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# AIMS AND ENDS.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

By C. C. G.

VOL. I.

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# AIMS AND ENDS.

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## CHAPTER I.

"How may measured words adore  
The full, flowing harmony  
Of thy swan-like stateliness,

Eleänore?"

TENNYSON.

It is the latter end of May, bright, joyous real spring May, the May of the poets. The provoking disappointing part of our so much abused English spring had past away, and there came a foretaste of summer. Perhaps the very loveliest days of the whole year are those when the fair landscape basks in a summer sunshine, with the fresh bloom of

spring still upon wood and meadow, where everything is green, and blossoms of the most delicate hues are scattered over every bank, and twining through every hedgerow in the richest profusion. Yes! I almost think the pretty little village of Norrington did look its best in the spring, and no wonder; for the broad expanse of Cranston Moor was glowing with golden furze, while the wooded hills of Bolton Park, swelling in the distance, filled in the background of the picture with rich masses of green.

In front, rich meadows, some half mown, some waving ready for the scythe, sloped gently to a small stream which ran merrily away to the town of Ashwell, about a couple of miles distant. I do not know that Oak Cottage merits a very particular description; from its windows might be seen the view I have endeavoured to describe. On a broad gravel walk outside these windows a young girl was pacing up and down with a book in her hand, she was not reading however, and

the expression of her beautiful face, for very beautiful it was, was rather petulant and *ennuyée*. She stopped for a moment, then turned to the right at an angle of the building, and beneath an open lattice window began to sing "Come into the garden, Maude." The words rang out with wonderful clearness and brilliancy, but she did not get far in the song.

"Eleanor! do you want me?" and the speaker looked out of the little lattice window.

"Yes, Maude, come out directly, I have been waiting till I am quite cross, and I cannot wait any longer; I want some one to talk to; bring your work out in the garden, it is summer now, whatever my uncle may say, let us sit under the chesnut."

"I should like it very much," said the hidden Maude from her latticed chamber; "I am only thinking whether mamma will not be afraid of my taking my work out of doors, I think she said the air made things rotten."

"O no, she could not possibly have said such a thing as that, you will get on with your work as quickly again if I read to you the while, or we can talk."

"I will come then," said Maude, and presently out from a side door issued a slender, delicate looking girl, with her arms full of calico, or some such white stuff.

Eleanor took some of it from her and led the way to the great chesnut tree on the lawn and they established themselves comfortably at a rustic table. Let us leave them awhile to their book and their work while we give a little description of the inmates of Oak Cottage.

I said that one of these two girls was beautiful. Yes! Eleanor Leigh, now nearly nineteen, was one of the loveliest girls in the county of Devon. It was not so much that her features were regular and her eyes gloriously bright, as that her radiant smile and arch liveliness had something so fascinating about them as to be exceedingly dangerous to those of the

sterner sex whose unlucky star guided them too often within the sphere of her charms. But Eleanor had early made up her mind that she must make "a splendid match," and cared little to waste her smiles on any who were not favoured by the fickle goddess. She chafed sometimes at the quiet of her life at Norrington, which she considered, in fact, as a sad waste of her time, and was ever sighing in secret for some wider field where her attractions might be displayed to better advantage.

On the death of her widowed mother, Eleanor Leigh had been left in the charge of her uncle, Mr. Ferne, of Oak Cottage. Here, during all her youthful days, she found herself happy enough, petted and admired for her beauty and her cleverness, and looked up to as a being of a superior order by two cousins younger than herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Ferne were exceedingly commonplace people; they had married late in life, and always gave you the idea of being a

bachelor and old maid spoilt. Existence seemed to be a burden to each at times, and one only wondered that people so pressed down by cares of different kinds could ever get through life in any sort of way ; as it was they never seemed happy like other people, or indeed ever comfortable in their minds ; there was always something about which to worry themselves and other people ; lucky was it when it was only themselves.

Mr. Ferne was somewhat of a *malade imaginaire*, and spent almost all his time in examining himself for fresh symptoms of some imaginary complaint, which complaint "when found, he made a note of," then hunted out in his medical books, of which he possessed a whole library. Perhaps he might have two or three very different complaints in the course of a month ; each complaint would require a different regimen, so there was a constant little excitement as to whether Mr. Ferne liked cold or heat ; windows open or windows shut ; noise to stimulate the nerves

or quiet to soothe them. Mr. Ferne required constant waiting upon. Mr. Ferne's nerves were to be always in everybody's mind, they were like a great network filling the house, in which no one however careful could avoid entangling themselves sometimes.

His wife, on the other hand, appeared to be possessed by the demon of fidget and activity. The master sat in his arm chair like a very Juggernaut, requiring all his household to immolate themselves at his footstool, and the mistress—yes! I think she was even yet more terrible, more irritating to those who were doomed to live with her. In one thing both perfectly agreed, namely in carrying out a mean and narrow minded system of economy; not from necessity, for they possessed an income amply sufficient for their own wants and for those of their children.

It is strange how often it is the case that people consider themselves justified in any degree of meanness by flattering their consciences into the belief that it is for their



children. Maude and Tom, too, were just at an age when they began painfully to see through the smooth surface and the high sounding words of their parents, and it was very trying to them, poor things, sometimes to be debarred from some pleasant visit or a gay fête because their mamma could not make up her mind to the outlay of a few shillings for some little article of dress for the occasion.

Wearying, miserable meanness, which would make the master peevish, and the mistress irritable for a whole day if they discovered by chance that they could have saved twopence by going to some other shop.

Perhaps it was scarcely to be wondered at that after she came to reside at Oak Cottage, when, her school days over, she returned a "finished" young lady—even then too much alive to her own charms, Eleanor Leigh's ideas of the importance of riches became considerably enlarged. She was not mean herself, few young people are, unless

stern necessity has taught them early the importance of money, and even in that case let us hope the generous spirit of youth would more easily learn the hard lesson of self-denial than the covetous and money loving, money hoarding, spirit of more advanced age.

The pair under the chesnut tree on the lawn have been working and reading for some time, while we have been reviewing the characters of the heads of the family.

"Hi! May, hi,"—cried a voice behind Maude, and Eleanor's pet, a very shaggy little Skye darted at Maude's reel of cotton, which had rolled off the table, and carried it off in triumph.

"Oh, Tom, do make her give it up; what will mamma say? she will say I am so careless. O, do get it for me."

Poor Maude looked really vexed, and Tom tried to coax May back again, and soon brought back the reel, not the better for the tossing it had received in the little shaggy paws. Tom was always in mischief—Toms

always are—he was nearly eleven, and was just come home for a half holiday; a fine merry looking fellow he was, with his ruddy brown complexion, his laughing eyes, full of the very spirit of mischief, and his thick brown hair tossed back from the broad open forehead. Truly it seemed almost strange that both Maude and Tom were so unlike their parents in everything; but perhaps it was that the peculiarities of Mr. and Mrs. Ferne were such as were most alien to the free happy temper of youth, youth blessed with fine health and joyous spirits; perhaps, too, these very peculiarities had driven the brother and sister to take refuge more in each other's society than might have been the case if their parents had been more sympathizing.

Tom's loud voice and boyish spirits had all his life been too trying to his father's nerves to admit of his taking much delight in his presence, and the same high spirits and boyish love of mischief were a constant source of annoyance and irritation to his mother.

“Tom keep your feet still, you’ll wear a hole in the carpet.” “Tom take all those things out of your pocket, it will have to be mended again,” these constant checks often ended in an outburst of temper on the part of master Tom, who was then dismissed in disgrace to find his own amusements where he could. Happy it was for him when he sought Maude’s sympathy and help in his troubles; her sympathy was ever ready, her help willingly given, and though Tom had a school-boy’s contempt for girls in general, in the depths of his own heart he made an exception in favour of his sister.

Other and more favourable influences had had a share in forming Maude’s character. Some four or five years before our history begins, Mr. Hastings became Rector of Norrington; on his arrival at his pretty parsonage he was accompanied by a widowed mother and a sister, considerably older than himself. Mrs. Hastings, whom sorrow had heavily visited, was soon attracted by the sweet face

and gentle manners of Maude Ferne, then a shy girl of fourteen. Her timidity, however, melted away as frost before the sun under the winning kindness of Mrs. Hastings. Two daughters she had lost, at about the age of Maude; and to Mrs. Hastings's aching heart it was sweet and soothing to retrace in Maude's features, and still more in her character, some shadowy likeness to her lost ones.

In Mrs. Hastings, Maude found a second mother, and from her daughter Margaret, she received the most valuable part of her education. It is true that from her earliest years her mother had been her instructress, according to some new and most elaborate scheme, in which somehow or other, every science, every language, every accomplishment was brought in in homœopathic doses.

Many and many a time has poor Maude gone to pay her daily visit at the parsonage with her head aching, her little anxious face worn and pale, and the traces of tears yet lingering in her heavy eyes; hoping, and not

in vain, for some word of kindness, some help in her hard lesson which her mother could not find time to explain to her.

When at length Mrs. Hastings's always delicate health began to decline more rapidly, and she could no longer take her usual place in the large arm chair by the drawing room window, Maude's spare hours, which indeed were few, were still spent at her side, and her greatest pleasure was to share with Margaret all the little cares and loving watchfulness required by the dear invalid.

When at last care and watchfulness were no longer required, and the loved voice was gone for ever, Maude sorrowed almost as if it were her own mother she had lost, and the true appreciation she shewed of their loved one's worth and her unaffected grief, endeared her still more, if that were possible, to the heart of Margaret Hastings.

"I know what you two girls are talking about," said Tom, "I think I should have

listened if it had not been for May's finding the cotton."

"Well then, Tom, tell us; it is almost more than I could do myself," said Eleanor, laughing.

"You've been telling each other secrets, to be sure,—talking about lovers, girls always do."

Eleanor coloured, and said, "no such thing, Tom, we have been reading—"

"Poetry! stuff!" said that young gentleman, glancing at the open volume which lay on the table. "Then I'm quite sure it's about love and lovers, so I am right after all, you see—"

In proof of Tom's discernment, it is necessary to add that the book was Coleridge's exquisite translation of *Wallenstein*, and the two girls had been criticising their favourite heroes—talking, as girls will talk, a great deal of nonsense, mixed, no doubt, with some sense.

“You are right, Tom,” said Maude, “there *is* a lover in this book ; some day you will find that it will shew you what a real hero ought to be.”

“No,” said Eleanor, “I do not think Max is a perfect hero ; remember he offers to desert to Wallenstein’s side, if Thekla wishes him to do so ; he owns the guilt of Wallenstein’s treason, but yet he offers to become a traitor himself for the sake of winning her ; he thinks Wallenstein may be successful, and he will not lose any chance of winning a Princess for his bride. I do not know that he was so far wrong there ; such a prize was worth running the risk for ; if Wallenstein had succeeded his conduct would not have been looked upon as treason, and Max would have won a glorious position for himself ; I cannot blame him, but I cannot consider him a perfect hero, *sans peur et sans reproche*.”

“O, Eleanor,” said Maude her eyes flashing and the colour rising in a cheek that was generally white as marble, “Eleanor, I am



sure you are wrong—Max never thought for one moment of being a traitor, he could not have doubted for a moment; he would not have loved Thekla if she had been other than she was, and he knew her character too well to doubt her choice; remember what he says

“To this heart—  
To this unerring heart will I submit it,  
Will ask thy love, which has the power to bless  
The happy man alone, averted ever  
From the disquieted and guilty. Canst thou  
Still love me if I stay? Say that thou canst,  
And I am the Duke’s.”

He knew that the honour of his name would be far dearer to her than any earthly happiness; he knew that her love for her father could not darken her clear sense of right and wrong, and he knew that she would choose any misery in which she might still have the proud satisfaction of keeping the image of her Max ever unsullied in her inmost heart, rather than win happiness and power for him and herself by one shade of dishonour. Oh Max is a true hero, Eleanor, own that he is?”

"Anything for peace and quietness, Maude; you really look quite excited, fighting for this hero of yours; I have no doubt he will do very well, *faute de mieux*. Oh why are there no such heroes now a days," she added with a half sigh, "I should, I own, be contented even with a Max."

"Do not despair, Eleanor, I have a better opinion of mankind in general than you have, and I am quite ready to believe that even in these prosaic days there are heroes still, if we look below the surface."

"Oh, I do not want to look below the surface. I must find some one out of the common before I own anything heroic in any man. I should never care for any one unless I knew that every one else was trying to get him; then there would be some pleasure in winning what others, my superiors perhaps in rank and fortune, had hoped for in vain. Fancy, Maude, the pleasure of such a triumph, over Arabella Bolton for instance. Mrs. Bolton thinks there is no one in the world

like her daughter, and I know they both look down upon us because we are not rich. Arabella often hints to me that she could not eat her dinner unless she had a footman behind her chair."

"I am glad we are more independent," said Maude, smiling; "but, Eleanor, I do not agree with you as to the pleasures of such a triumph as you speak of."

"No, no, I know you have the most romantic ideas. You dream of some hero; such as, believe me, you can only find in books, with a host of perfections."

"Nay, Eleanor, do not make me out such a dreamer as that; I know we do not agree in our ideas of what constitutes a hero. Your *beau ideal* is too dazzling; one thing is certain, he must have had a fairy godmother to endow him with so many good things. Let me see, riches, rank, and strikingly handsome face and figure—am I not right?—combined with fascinating manners and brilliant talents, then, to crown all, he is to be admired and

sought by every one, but care nothing so he can but obtain one smile from the haughty queen of his affections, Eleanor Leigh. Oh !” she added, laughing, “I can see the scene perfectly, but the hero? I do not see him clearly in my mental picture ; is it Mr. Ferris?”

“ Mr. Ferris indeed !” said Eleanor, with an expression of scorn flashing over her beautiful features, “ Mr. Ferris ! do not make me angry, Maude, I have indeed been told more than once to take care lest I should break his heart ; as if such an insignificant creature should have a heart to break. Oh no ! it is all very well to make him useful sometimes, to fetch and carry, when no better cavalier is in the way. The risk be on his own head, if he ever presumes to think more of my civility to him than he has any right to do.”

“ And yet, Eleanor—”

“ What is it, Maude ? a lecture ?”

“ Yes, I suppose so !”

"But really not on the subject of James Ferris, it is too absurd."

"O, Eleanor, I do not wish—I have no right to lecture you, only remember it will *not* be Mr. Ferris's fault if he values such kindness, such flattering words as yours were yesterday, more highly than you might intend him to do. Forgive me," she added still more earnestly, and colouring slightly as she marked Eleanor's impatient toss of the head—"forgive me, but do not make an enemy of Mr. Ferris; there is every now and then an expression in his face which almost frightens me, a kind of dogged fierce determination which makes me think that if he once set his mind very much upon anything, I should not like to be the thing or person that might be in his way. Do you remember the day we saw him beating his horse in that savage way? I never see him without thinking of it."

"Yes! it was too bad of him," said Eleanor, carelessly, "but the horse shied a good deal

and would not pass something or other—I daresay he was in a passion.”

“No, it was not that he was in a passion, that would have been bad, but to me it was something even worse, he was quite pale; but you remember he stopped when he saw us and spoke quite coolly, and when you said something about the poor horse, he said, ‘The horse must learn that he has a master, who *will* be obeyed.’ It was not so much the words, but the look and the smile; the poor horse was trembling and panting, and I trembled as much, I think; and then, when we had passed the corner of the lane, we heard the sound of the blows again.”

“Let us talk of something more pleasant then! why, Maude, you are half crying, there are tears on your eyelashes now! Well, I will not flirt *much* with him in future, only a little now and then, just to keep my hand in, for he is the only gentleman I can practise upon here, for Mr. Hastings is your own par-

ticular property, and I dare not interfere there, and Mr. Selby—”

Maude was going to interrupt her cousin ; but at the same moment Tom, who had long ago found the conversation “too slow for him,” returned, out of breath, to tell them that Mr. Ferne was in a great state of alarm, having only just discovered their imprudence, “Jane is just collecting your cloaks and goloshes,” he added, “so I should advise you to cut and run.” They hastily collected books and work, and ran to the house, just as Jane appeared in the distance with her load of wraps.

## CHAPTER II.

"Dead shepherd ! now I find thy saw of might—  
'Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight.'"

AS YOU LIKE IT.

It was a warm spring afternoon ; stifling and hot was the atmosphere of the pretty drawing room at Oak Cottage. A large fire glowed in the grate, and in a large and well stuffed easy chair close to it reclined Mr. Ferne ; he had a newspaper in his hand, from which every now and then he read aloud for his wife's benefit, some cheering piece of information relative to the unusual unhealthiness of the season, some fearful accident, or new collision in a tunnel. Mrs. Ferne was seated in her usual place, at her usual occupation, looking over bills.



“Frederic, my love,—I am sorry to be obliged to request you to desist, but I assure you the interesting intelligence you are reading interferes with the concentration of my attention upon some very important details.”

A dead silence reigned for some time, only interrupted by some deep sighs from Mrs. Ferne, and the scratching of her steel pen upon the paper before her : at last she spoke.

“Frederic, my love?”

“Well, Maria, what is it?”

“Can you come to me? I require your attention for a few moments.”

Mr. Ferne put down his paper with a resigned look, and turned his chair so as to face his wife’s *escritoire*, with the air of a martyr.

“It is becoming quite serious, I assure you, Frederic; here is Fowler’s bill for mending Tom’s trousers, three pairs since the beginning of the half-year ! At his age he ought to know better than to wear them out so shamefully. I must beg you to desire him never to climb a tree again.”

“Oh, Maria, what would I give for such limbs as his! Ah, if I could climb a tree!” But recalled in a moment to a sense of his position as he marked a cloud gathering on Mrs. Ferne’s brow, he resumed quickly, “I will speak to him on the subject, my dear, but why do you not get some stronger ones made for him?”

“I was going to speak to you about that also. I am afraid I have nothing left now to make up for him; those three last pairs you remember were made out of my large travelling cloak that I had for my wedding; but summer is coming on and he will not require cloth clothes, so I was thinking—”

“What, my dear?”

“Do you not remember that piece of the cotton drugget that was left when the carpet was covered, that would make up into a nice summer suit for him.”

“What a good idea,” said Mr. Ferne, who cared not to combat any of his wife’s econo-

mical schemes, and was only too happy to have the question settled that he might return to his paper in peace.

Presently the laughing face of Eleanor appeared at the window, "Aunt," she said, "can you not come out with us this lovely afternoon?"

"No, I cannot spare the time; I am busy, I cannot make my accounts come right."

"Oh never mind those tiresome bills, there will be a rainy day soon."

"There would indeed soon come a rainy day, Eleanor, if I neglected my duties as you and Maude would have me do; my time is too precious to waste in walking. If Maude is going with you, tell her to change her dress; it is perfect wastefulness to wear that new mohair as she does; tell her the old brown one will do; you will meet no one if you are not going towards Ashwell, and it is too late for that."

Maude, who was within hearing, looked sadly at her cousin.

"It is torn, mamma," she said, "I could not wear it even on Cranston Moor, where we are thinking of going."

"Then remain at home and mend it," said the hard-hearted matron, and she re-settled herself to her rows of little figures with an expression on her face which allowed no second appeal.

With a swelling heart the poor girl turned away, and Eleanor proposed to wait until the necessary repairs were made; but this was not allowed, so with Tom for her companion, who had just joined her on his way home from school, she set off for her walk. Tom, I am afraid, having an eye to a little bird's-nesting on the way, and I may as well mention at once that he returned home with another hole in his trousers, thereby wounding his mother's feelings in one of the tenderest points, and received in consequence a proportionate scolding.

Tom and Eleanor walked on gaily through

the fields, Eleanor talking goodnaturedly about birds' eggs and rabbits, and receiving various confidences in the matter of ferrets.

"Oh, cousin, such beauties they are; I only wish I was like other boys and had plenty of pocket money, wouldn't I buy them."

"But I do not think you would be allowed to keep them, Tom, if you had the money."

"I don't think papa would mind, and mamma need not know, she always says pets eat so much, but I *could* afford to buy meat for them and a little drop of skim milk, I don't think she would mind, it is James Ferris's groom who has them for sale, and I think he will let me pay him by degrees, you know I could do that."

"I would advance the money, Tom, if my uncle did not mind your keeping them."

"Oh, Eleanor, what a good one you are now, now I won't tease May for ever so long, no, that I won't, that *is* kind of you," and a second edition of praises of the ferrets and

their management lasted until, the last field passed, they emerged on the top of Cranston Moor, a piece of rugged, heathy looking ground, which descended abruptly into the valley at the side opposite from them, and from which a splendid view to the south and west might be obtained.

Eleanor and Maude especially delighted in an evening walk to the Moor, that they might watch the sun go down behind the line of hills in the far horizon. The golden furze was all bursting into a blaze of gold, and delicate and lovely spring blossoms, sheltered under the sturdy bushes, were showing their fairy-like flowers, all fresh from their winter's sleep. Eleanor soon had her hands full of them and sat down to wait for Tom, who was hunting for nests in the low bushes and rough grass that grew on the edge of the Moor.

The sun was going down in all his splendour, and she longed for Maude to enjoy the

glorious sight with her. Tired at last with waiting, she looked round impatiently, as she heard footsteps approaching, but instead of her cousin, she saw two gentlemen sauntering slowly along. As they came towards her she recognized in the elder of the two, the owner of Bolton Park, the squire of the parish he was indeed, with whom she and her uncle's family had necessarily some slight acquaintance. The other was a stranger, and a much younger man. He stopped for a moment and said a few words in a low tone to his companion, his eye, the meanwhile fixed upon herself.

Eleanor felt she was looking her best, she felt that the balmy air and the exercise had given radiance to her eyes and a richer glow to her cheek, and a thrill of pleasure shot through her heart as she caught the words, "What a lovely creature; who is she?"

"Ah, yes! fine girl, very, quite the belle of the country;" then coming nearer, with an

attempt at politeness, he continued, "Why, Miss Leigh, you look positively bewitching this evening, here is my friend, Mr. Stafford, quite dazzled by such a fair apparition, and all alone on the common too! we expect you to vanish like a fairy in the twinkling of an eye!"

"My cousin is here, Mr. Bolton," said Eleanor, rising, "or was here," she added laughing, as she looked round her in vain for the truant, "there is some magic in birds' nests which has kept him away too long, it is getting late and I wish he would come back."

"Allow us to have the pleasure of escorting you home, Miss Leigh," said the gallant old gentleman, and as the shades of evening were closing in, Eleanor gladly availed herself of the offer.

The three walked slowly across the Moor, lingering every now and then to give Tom a chance of overtaking them.

"What a lovely view from this Moor,"



said the gentleman who had been introduced as Mr. Stafford, "I should fancy, Miss Leigh, it must be a favourite walk of yours."

"It is indeed," said Eleanor, "we often during the summer watch the sunset from this place."

"It is indeed glorious," said Mr. Stafford, stopping for a minute to take a farewell look at the splendid array of crimson clouds.

"Come, come, Charles, don't go dreaming away the little daylight that is left, but help Miss Leigh over the stile, and let us take her safe home while we can."

Eleanor's heart throbbed with a strange feeling of gratified vanity; the stranger who walked at her side was strikingly handsome, and she felt, rather than saw, that he watched every look, every change of her countenance as she chatted gaily to the fat, good tempered Mr. Bolton.

"Of course you are going to Mrs. Ferris's dance next week?"

"Yes, I believe we are going," answered

Eleanor, her mind however, a little misgiving her as to the result of her aunt's investigations into the state of poor Maude's wardrobe, for often after such an invitation had been accepted, it was declined again at the last moment, on account of Mr. Ferne not feeling well enough to spare them. The truth being that some deficiency had been found in the dress of either Maude or her mother, which the latter could not make up her mind to supply.

When, however, Mr. Stafford turned to her and eagerly inquired if she would dance the first waltz and galop with him, the resolution darted into her mind that she would contrive to go at any cost, "Even if I have to buy Maude's dress myself," she added, mentally, in a fit of unwonted generosity. So she promised gladly to dance with Charles Stafford, and thought as she did so that as far as appearance went she had found at last the hero of her day dreams.

"He is very handsome," she thought, "I have

never seen him in the neighbourhood before, and Mr. Bolton has not many such friends," and she went off in a speculative reverie. O Eleanor, you have not lived with your aunt for nothing, her lessons of worldly wisdom, her ideas on the all-importance of riches and "position," have done their work, and have crept into your heart and head more easily than might have been expected in one so young. They have met with a kindred soil !

The little party separated as they came in sight of the white gate which led to Oak Cottage: and the unlucky Tom just then overtook them, his appearance by no means improved by several long scratches across his cheek and a yellow stream of egg meandering down his forehead.

"Oh Tom, you disobedient boy, only look at your trousers," were the ominous words of Mrs. Ferne, as Eleanor and the delinquent entered the house, and unfortunately encountered Mrs. Ferne in the hall.

Eleanor went silently upstairs. Slowly she took off her hat and cloak and then sat down by the window in her own room to *think*. And of what did she think? Of a tall active form, of brown hair clustering in thick curls over a noble brow, of deep blue eyes, so soft when they looked on her, and of a voice whose deep quiet tones had become so different when he spoke to her, so changed from the light careless accents in which he had spoken to his friend.

Love at first sight! How Eleanor would yesterday have laughed at the idea, but this evening she began to own to herself that it might not be all a fancy, a dream. Eleanor was deeply learned in novels, and she was fully aware that many a hero had been deeply wounded by one glance even of such eyes as her own. She could therefore safely allow to herself that her walk of nearly a mile might have afforded ample time for a decided impression to have been made, and she went

down stairs to tea, radiant with smiles and occasionally blushing at her own thoughts as she pictured to herself their next meeting, Mrs. Ferris's party, and the triumph of being led out to dance by so handsome and distinguished-looking a partner.

While Eleanor sips her tea and dreams of conquests we must change the scene to Bolton Park, where the non-arrival of the gentlemen at the usual hour of tea excited great commotion in the mind of Mrs. Bolton.

"Mr. Bolton! Mr. Stafford! has anyone seen Mr. Bolton? here has tea been waiting ten minutes and the cakes will be quite cold! What can have become of him, it is getting so dark, but he is always standing about and catching cold! John! go down the drive and see if you can see anything of your master."

"Do be quiet, mamma, you always make such a fuss if papa is not at home to a minute, you know he will have his own way. Why

do you worry him so? What will Mr. Stafford think of you?"

"Mr. Stafford will think that I know how to value a good husband, and that is more than you will ever do, Arabella," returned Mrs. Bolton, a quick, fiery-eyed matron, who must in her youth have been exceedingly handsome. She made an impatient movement of her head and then walked briskly across the hall, opened the front door, and stood at the top of the flight of steps.

She stood there for some minutes, gazing out into the soft grey twilight, until her heart was set at rest by the appearance of the two gentlemen in the distance.

"Would you believe it, Arabella," she cried at the top of her voice to her daughter, "would you believe it! Here it is almost nine o'clock and there is your father sauntering along as slowly as if it was luncheon time instead of being late for tea as he is."

"He has been dragging Mr. Stafford round the farm, depend upon it, mamma. I wish he

knew better than to worry his visitors all day long about his improvements and such nonsense ; but I am quite sure of one thing, if Mr. Stafford does not choose to come in earlier I shall not sing a note to him, and you need not ask me, mamma. Let him talk to papa all the evening about the farm if he likes, but no music shall he have if he doesn't behave more civilly than this."

By this time the guilty pair had made their appearance, and been greeted by both ladies at once.

" So, Mr. Bolton, I shall have to send for Carter to-morrow."

" I hope not my dear, who is ill ?"

" *You* will be laid up, I know *that* very well, but who is to nurse you I want to know ? here am I with such a shocking cold, and obliged to stand on the steps in the night air this half hour looking for you."

" And who wanted you to do so ? Not I, I am sure," said her husband with a look of resignation stealing over his face.

"Now why are you so rude to me, Mr. Bolton?" she returned with a raised voice; "it is all for your good. Ah! What you will do when you have not me to look after you, goodness only knows, not I; and I shall not trouble you long." Then with the air of a martyr she took her seat at the tea table.

"But what has made you so late?" asked Arabella, with a bewitching glance at Mr. Stafford, "here is all the wool I was going to wind which you promised to hold for me; now I shall punish you by not singing a note to-night."

Charles Stafford did not seem inclined to begin a quarrel on this account with the young lady as she doubtless expected he would have done, but quietly received his cup from Mrs. Bolton, who was perhaps soothed into a more amiable mood by the fragrant fumes of the tea, and condescended at last to inquire of her husband "what he had been doing with himself and his young friend till that hour of the night?"



"We walked to see the new mill Davis is building, my dear, and then went over the moor, and we should have been home half an hour earlier, but we found Eleanor Leigh on the moor, and as that young imp, Tom, seemed to have entirely forgotten that he had to escort her home, we could do no less than see her safe to Oak Cottage."

Arabella looked up quickly and glanced at Charles Stafford, who sipped his tea unmoved, and appeared to have left all the talking to Mr. Bolton.

"Eleanor Leigh; and what was she doing there I should like to know!" exclaimed Mrs. Bolton, lifting up her hands and eyes. "A bold minx that she is! well! I am thankful that my child does know what's what better than she does with all her—Why! they call her a beauty! with her great eyes and her pale face—no! no, give me something more than that, not but what she is well enough if she would only dress herself decently, and then if she would put her hair up nice and

tight like my Bella's, instead of letting it fall anyhow, in those great black curls. Why, my good friend (to Mr. Stafford), would you believe it, her friends let that poor girl go trapesing about the country no better than a gipsy, early in the morning, or late at night, it's all the same to them. Bella says there is something in her too in spite of it all—don't you, Bella? and proud she is, yes, as proud as Lucifer, nothing is good enough for my lady; just as if she was an heiress, when all the world knows she can't have more than a hundred a year when she does come of age; and that uncle and aunt of hers are a pair of the veriest screws, and take care that she does not get a scrap of food but what is paid for to the very outside."

"Did you think her pretty?" asked Arabella, turning to Mr. Stafford.

Now if Charles Stafford had said what he really thought, if Mrs. Bolton's drawing room had been an apartment in the Castle of Truth

for instance, he would have replied in some such terms as these, "pretty ! I think her the loveliest creature I ever beheld ! To walk by her side, to watch the easy grace of her movements, the light and shade of every emotion as it flitted across her expressive countenance, to do this once more I would give months of the dull everyday life of Bolton Park." But he knew better than to pour his admiration into unsympathizing ears, so he only played with his tea-spoon and said, "yes, Miss Bolton, as far as I had an opportunity of judging in a light that was beginning to grow somewhat dusky, I should say she was decidedly handsome ; her style of beauty is uncommon and perhaps the more striking on that account."

"I do not know how it is, but no one seems to like her very much, poor thing," said Miss Bolton, with a slight tinge of complaint in her tone. "It appears that she does not improve on acquaintance, I have done what I could to introduce her in several quarters where I

thought it might have been useful, but somehow or other she does not *take* with gentlemen. I suppose," she added with a little laugh, " gentlemen now are grown wiser and look a little after the tin, as you men say ; beauty is all very well, but when poverty comes in at the door love is sure to fly out of the window ; is it not so, Mr. Stafford ?"

Now Miss Bolton was an only child and the heiress of a considerable fortune. Bolton Park alas ! was entailed, and would at the death of her father become the property of a distant cousin, which was a very sore point ; but Miss Bolton had early made up her mind that, with her fortune and other attractions, she would have no difficulty in procuring an establishment of her own long before there should be any necessity for giving up the fine old house to a stranger.

However, strange to say, Arabella Bolton, reputed heiress to eight hundred a year, had found more difficulty in accomplishing her

plans on this point than she had anticipated, and towards the close of her twenty-eighth year found herself still Arabella Bolton.

She was tolerably good looking, with a fine figure, and with dashing rather than lady-like manners, and had attracted the attention of several men at different times who would gladly have taken the lady in consideration of the money ; but Arabella had in her earlier days been very nearly taken in by a worthless adventurer whose true history was fortunately made known to her just in time to save her from a miserable marriage, and she had a constant dread ever afterwards of being sought only for her money. She looked on most men therefore with an eye of suspicion, and yet was never happy unless she could attract them to herself.

Admiration was necessary to her happiness, and she did not scruple to lay the most bare-faced traps for it, but her naturally quick and irritable temper from frequent disappointments

had become so soured, and betrayed itself so plainly in the lines of her mouth, the sharp tones of her voice, and the lowering glance which the slightest contradiction drew from her eye, that a man who had any regard for his domestic peace might be excused for hesitating long before committing the care of that "halycon daughter of the skies" into her keeping. Charles Stafford was some years younger than herself, but she did not consider him too young to flirt with, and she had even seriously asked herself whether she might not say "yes" this time to the proposal she expected.

¶ As to Mr. Stafford himself, nothing was farther from his thoughts than marriage when he came to Bolton Park, accepting the invitation from his father's old friend, partly as an agreeable rest from his studies, partly that he might ask Mr. Bolton's counsel as to his future course of life. He was a barrister, and though he had high connections and bright expectations for the future, he could not live

only upon those, and as briefs came in but slowly at present, he was at times rather disheartened, and the shade of sadness that occasionally clouded his brow, and the silent thoughtfulness of his manner, instead of being caused, as Arabella flattered herself, by a dawning passion, were the results of a somewhat morbid brooding over his own position.

Vainly had his kind friend, Mr. Bolton, tried to impress upon him the necessity of waiting patiently, that every profession was, and must be, very uphill work at first, that "better days would come," &c., and all the well meant, set speeches that fall so coldly upon a heart, burning to do something great—to make itself known—to find but an opening—ever so small a one, in which to insert the small end of the wedge! feeling so confident that then the world would quickly own a genius above the common, and that honour and fame would then fall on the head that deserved them!

Mr. Bolton had at last induced him o

apply to a distant relation, the Earl of C——, who might reasonably be supposed, without putting himself to much inconvenience, to be able to find some opening for his talented kinsman, where, without feeling fettered by the weight of obligations, his own abilities and energy might win an honourable position for himself. After much hesitation, he had written this letter, and was now anxiously, but almost hopelessly, awaiting a reply. Yes, he was hopeless, because his life hitherto had been made up of disappointments, and he feared that he should be doomed to waste the best years of his life—earning a bare subsistence—hoping and disappointed !

Day after day he had been intending to leave his comfortable quarters at Bolton Park and return to his dreary chambers ; but he felt that the change to a brighter atmosphere was a rest and refreshment to both body and mind, and he willingly allowed himself to be persuaded to linger day after day in hopes of



the arrival of the Earl's letter, which might make further consultation with Mr. Bolton desirable. Mrs. Bolton had also done her part in persuading him to stay for Mrs. Ferris's party, which was expected to be a very gay affair, half hoping that by skilful management his lengthened visit might be made productive of results which she in her motherly heart most earnestly desired.

It is fair to Charles Stafford to add, that he had not the remotest idea either of Mrs. Bolton's wishes, or of the penchant of the fair Arabella herself. Mr. Bolton was *his* friend, and in his esteem for the genuine worth and sound practical sense which were concealed under the somewhat rough exterior of the Squire, it must be owned he rather overlooked the ladies—enough, that is to say to make him perfectly blind as to their aims and ends.

Mrs. Bolton's almost motherly kindness which was often absolutely worrying in the

way it extended over all his actions, was put down, chiefly to an old regard for his father, and Arabella's tastes and conversation suited him so little, that it never crossed his mind that she might find greater attraction in his.

## CHAPTER III.

Lady Clara Vere de Vere,  
Of me you shall not win renown,  
You sought to break a country heart,  
For pastime ere you went to town.

TENNYSON.

IN the very quiet life led by Eleanor and Maude at Oak Cottage, the occurrence of such an event as a large dance given by an acquaintance at Ashwell, was a matter of much anticipation. Much talk had the two girls over their dresses, many cogitations as to the people they should meet, and Eleanor at least gave the reins to her imagination and allowed herself to dream pleasant dreams of triumph: she fancied the pleasure of meeting Mr. Staf-

ford when there would be plenty of people present to remark his admiration of her, and the attention she had already settled in her own mind that he was to pay her.

Maude's thoughts were more simple ; she was fond of dancing, she loved the inspiring music of the Ashwell band, she had never yet been at a regular ball, and she had enjoyed the little impromptu dances at Christmas time which had come in her way, well enough to have a very bright idea of the delights of a regular *grown-up* ball. The important day had at last arrived, and I must say it appeared very long until it was time to begin to think about dressing. Maude was busy putting the finishing touches to some blue bows, on which she depended to set off her very simple dress, when the maid suddenly entered the room with a horrified expression of face,—

“O, if you please sir, the ferret has been and pitched on Master Tom's nose, and we can't get him off”—

"Oh my poor nerves," said Mr. Ferne, "that boy will be the death of me I know; do some of you go and see what can be done—perhaps if you were to hold some chloroform to the creature's nose it might stupify it."

"And Tom too," said Eleanor, as she and Maude rushed out of the room and ran to the stables.

By the time they arrived there, Tom was relieved of his troublesome appendage and was bathing the wounded feature with warm water.

"Oh, Eleanor," he said eagerly, "it was not Tip's fault; I had not fed him, because I was going out to-morrow morning ratting. I held my face down too near the cage, and Tip seized my nose, poor fellow, he must have been very hungry."

"All's well that ends well, Tom," said Eleanor, "but you had best keep Tip better fed in future."

Maude returned to the house to tell her

father that the chloroform had not been required, and they found, to their great delight, that Mrs. Ferne had actually gone upstairs to dress.

"You do not really intend to go with us, papa?"

"No, my dear, I had thoughts of it up to half past three o'clock, but at that time I began to suffer from a sensation of drowsiness; that might perhaps have yielded to remedies, but this last foolish act of Tom's has quite upset me, I am fit for nothing; you must make my excuses to Mrs. Ferris and her son, but she knows the very uncertain state of my health and will scarcely expect me, I daresay."

"Eleanor, are you ready?" said Mrs. Ferne as she entered the dining room, arrayed in a very stiff dress of some old-fashioned material that had descended to her from some grandmother or great grandmother; so stiff it was, so thick, it seemed as if it could never wear out, and also as if the unfortunate

wearer could never sit down ; it stood out in all directions so impracticably stiff and unyielding. The make of it too was as antique as the material, for vain had been Mrs. Ferne's efforts to modernize it ; there was no possibility of matching it, and the scanty folds did not hide the angularities of the thin pinched little figure it enclosed. However, strange as it may seem, Mrs. Ferne was under the delusion that it was a very handsome dress, and during the few minutes that elapsed before the two girls were ready, she employed herself in carefully pinning it up all round, which operation gave her much the form of a peg-top, and in making arrangements that there might be no creases, when she should be obliged to sit down in the carriage.

Maude followed her mother in a dress of plain white muslin, and the few bows of faded blue ribbon only made the poverty of the poor girl's toilette more conspicuous. She was painfully conscious of this herself, and

looked half ashamed as her mother proceeded to inspect her, turning her round and holding the candle in all directions, that it might shed a different light upon the unfortunate subject.

Eleanor had been ready some time, and came forward into the light as her aunt and cousin entered the room. Lovely indeed she looked in her white dress with a wreath of pink hawthorn in her dark hair.

"Yes, aunt, I am quite ready," she said in a joyous tone.

"Stop one minute, Maude, let me pull your dress down a little."

"Take care, Eleanor," said Mrs. Ferne, "I am fearful lest the material should be somewhat tender, these delicate fabrics are unfortunately so fragile."

"Yes, Eleanor," said Maude, "Jane said it would scarcely bear even a pin; she tore it in two places in putting it on and that made me later."


"Well, my dear," said her mother, "if you



are very careful of it and it should happen that there are many parties next Christmas perhaps you may have a new one. Take care how you get into the carriage, both of you, fold your dresses carefully around you—no thank you—you both get in first and then when you are both settled I will get in, that I may not have to disarrange my dress.”

The thundering knock at Mrs. Ferris’s door dispelled a bright reverie in which Eleanor had been indulging for the two or three miles of their drive; but indeed it seemed as if the reverie was scarcely less bright than the reality.

“Ah! this is like fairy land,” whispered Maude, as they entered the large and elegantly decorated drawing room, which was made into a ball-room for the occasion. At one end large glass doors opened into a conservatory, where gay coloured lamps interspersed among the lovely flowers produced the brilliant effect which so struck Maude’s eye on entering.



The party was kindly welcomed by Mrs. Ferris, a bright, cheerful little woman, who loved to see happy faces around her.

The party from Bolton Park had already arrived, and Eleanor felt a thrill of pleasure as she noticed the start of surprise with which Mr. Stafford greeted her appearance. He was talking to Miss Bolton or rather *listening* to her, for her incessant stream of small talk required little more than an appearance of attention.

Arabella, too, noticed the eager look of admiration which lighted up his face as Mrs. Ferne and her two companions entered, and a frown passed over her countenance as she noticed the direction of his eye.

Mrs. Bolton smiled, and nodded to them good humouredly, and said, "well I must say I never saw Eleanor look so well before! she has a little of your colour to-night, Bella, but she has no flowers, no ornaments, she shall have my bouquet, it is only in my way!"

“What nonsense, mamma, surely she has plenty of flowers in her hair! a whole heap of them; real ones too, I declare! why they will be withered and good for nothing in an hour; for my part if I could not afford to wear proper things I would not attempt to be fine.”

Charles Stafford gazed for a few moments at the beautiful apparition, and then eagerly approached to remind her of the dances she had promised him.

Eleanor enjoyed her triumph; she was keen witted enough to see Arabella's mortification through the affectation of supreme indifference which that young lady assumed.

“Ah, Miss Leigh,” said Charles Stafford, “I must not tell you how often I have thought of these promised dances. We barristers grow old and mouldy in our dreary chambers, and for my part I feel when I come into the country as if I had two natures. I can scarcely believe I am the same Charles Stafford as he

who sits all day with his piles of dull papers before him, and goes out in the evening perhaps to a party, perhaps to the opera, or a play—but all with the same used up feelings.”

“Surely you must find our little country gaieties very triste, Mr. Stafford, unless indeed,” Eleanor added, laughing, “you find amusement in criticizing our country manners and fashions. Now do not deny it, for I shall not believe you if you do,” and her eye glanced half mischievously at Miss Bolton, who was engaged in a very violent flirtation with an officer from a neighbouring town.

“I dare not say that I never criticize, Miss Leigh, but whether you will believe me or not, I must tell you that I was never less disposed to do so than to-night—to-night I can only admire.”

Eleanor blushed as he whispered the last words, intended, as she felt they were, for herself alone.

Not two dances only did Charles and Eleanor dance together; we had better not disclose how many, nor how often they sat talking together while others whirled by them in mad career.

Maude's beauty was not of a style to be attractive in a ball-room, exceeding delicacy of feature, large soft grey eyes, which were generally timidly veiled beneath their long dark lashes, a complexion smooth as marble and almost as colourless, and fine, dark hair classically braided round her small and beautifully shaped head, were combined with a figure slender and graceful, but less tall and less striking than her cousin's; while her timidity and reserved manners made her often liable to be overlooked amongst strangers who knew not the depth and warmth of feeling that lay beneath that seeming cold exterior, or were unable to appreciate that gentle gaiety of manner which charmed those who knew her intimately. She blushed and looked half

frightened when Charles Stafford asked her to dance.

"Off with you, Maude," said Eleanor, as she took the arm of James Ferris, the only son of their hostess, "and you must tell me by and bye what you think of your first ball."

Charles resigned himself as best he might to the rather illnated observations of Miss Bolton during the dances for which he felt obliged to ask the honour of her hand: she was a good dancer, and piqued herself much upon it, and woe to those who failed to appreciate her accomplishments.

"Look at Miss Leigh now," she exclaimed, "dancing with that young Ferris—really how she does flirt with him! it is positively disgusting—it is quite evident that she is thinking how much she should like to be the mistress here—how eagerly they are talking! what an exhibition—it makes me ill to watch them."

Then the next time they stopped for a few moments breathing time—

“Did you ever see such an object as Mrs. Ferne makes of herself? as I always tell people, she is a walking rag shop—and that unfortunate daughter! How can Eleanor Leigh dress herself out in that style and let her cousin make such a fright of herself! Mamma, just look at Maude Ferne’s blue bows—why I would not offer them to my maid.”

“Oh, my dear,” said her mother, “Mr. Stafford will think that only daughters are sadly spoilt, but you must remember, every one is not so fortunate as you are.”

Arabella shrugged her shoulders, and when the dance was over went across the room to speak to Miss Leigh—moved thereto perhaps by the idea that it would not be many minutes before Mr. Stafford turned his steps in the same direction.

“My dear Miss Leigh,” she said, “I am

quite sorry to see you looking so tired and flushed, that last galop was quite a painful exhibition."

Eleanor coloured a little and tossed her beautiful head, "I shall have a better dancer for my next partner," she said, "Mr. Stafford is perfection."

"He dances well, certainly," said Miss Bolton, "but somewhat too quickly for me: there is nothing more unladylike than to rush about in that mad way—however, I suppose those who have seldom an opportunity of enjoying a dance, wish to make the most of their time—both in dancing and flirting," she added snappishly, as she noticed Mr. Stafford approaching them.

"One may as well enjoy one's-self while one is young," retorted Eleanor, "perhaps in ten years' time I too may prefer sitting still."

She gave her hand to Mr. Stafford and floated off again, happy in the consciousness of having had the last word. Others besides



Charles Stafford were dazzled and bewitched by the beauty and fascinations of Eleanor Leigh. Amongst those who scarcely left her side was James Ferris.

Mrs. Ferris had seen with pleasure for some time the admiration with which her only son had regarded Miss Leigh ; what mother could ever fancy her son unworthy of any woman on whom he might have set his affections, and James Ferris was almost idolized by his mother.

At an early age he had succeeded his father as the principal solicitor in the town of Ashwell. Coming into a flourishing business, he had extended it by his energy and attention, and was regarded by every one in the neighbourhood as a "very rising young man;" he was handsome, too, or at least his mother considered him so ; but the expression of his black eyes was not pleasing, and a determined look about the mouth spoke of obstinacy and ill temper. He was attentive to his mother,

but more so in company than in the seclusion of home, and she often wished in her secret heart that her dear James was a little more affectionate and warm hearted ; not that the poor woman ever really owned that he was deficient in these qualities, but sometimes she could not help a sigh when she contrasted his cool off-hand manner with the more warm and softened tones in which she had heard sons speak to their mothers.

The only being James Ferris had ever appeared to care for, up to this time, was his sister Lucy, a small, plain, delicate girl, somewhat deformed, whom a long course of ill-health had kept almost confined to her sofa. For Lucy he did feel as much affection as his nature was capable of, and this evening, having used all his eloquence to persuade her to let him bring her down stairs and place her upon a comfortable couch in a corner of the conservatory, where she would be out of the crowd and yet able to amuse herself by

watching the dancing, he remembered every now and then to go and see that her pillows were right, and that she had ices and wine.

"Ah, how beautiful Miss Leigh looks," said Lucy, "she is quite dazzling, and how happy she seems, it must be very pleasant"—

She stopped, for she did not wish to sadden her brother, "but," she continued, "do you know, James, I almost think I admire Miss Ferne more."

"You do not shew your usual good taste there, Lucy; the two cousins are not to be compared."

"No, I suppose not, really," she replied, "but to me there is something so sweet and noble in Miss Ferne's face, I should like to speak to her, if you will call her. I do not think she will mind sitting with me for a few minutes."

Maude came back in a few minutes with Mr. Ferris and warmly greeted the gentle invalid.

"I am so glad you can enjoy a little of this gay scene," said Maude. "Mrs. Ferris has arranged everything so beautifully. I did not know you would be able to be down stairs, or I should not have waited until this time without finding you out."

"Do not let me keep you here if you are going to dance," said Lucy, after they had chatted for a little while.

"I should like to stay with you a little longer if Mr. Ferris will kindly tell my cousin where I am," Maude said, and seated herself on the couch at Lucy's feet.

Mr. Ferris went back to claim Eleanor for another dance, after which he led her to a seat somewhat behind a stand of flowering plants.

"Miss Leigh," he said, "this evening is passing away too quickly! Oh that such bright moments could last! You are aware that I have little leisure, little spare time which I can call my own, and in consequence

I enjoy all the more keenly such happiness as I have been allowed to-night."

Eleanor played with her fan and answered carelessly, "Yes, it has been a very pleasant party; your mother does excel in this sort of thing, and your rooms are so well adapted for it."

"It is not *that*, Miss Leigh—you know—you must know what I mean—you cannot say that you have not long ago read the secret of my heart, and it is this knowledge that emboldens me now to tell you that I love you."

"Our flirtation has gone far enough, Mr. Ferris, I think," said Eleanor rising.

"No, Miss Leigh—Eleanor—you know I am in earnest—you know that I have loved you long, nearly ever since you came back to Norrington—you know how every word, every look of yours has been treasured by me—tell me that you have known this and that it has not displeased you."

"I cannot tell you this, Mr. Ferris. I am sorry—but it never entered my head that you cared for me; you are altogether mistaken."

"Oh, Eleanor," said the young man, growing deadly pale, "tell me, do you love another—is there any reason why in time you might not be induced to listen to me?"

"Really, Mr. Ferris, I know no right you have to question me in this way; let me go; people will see us."

"I will know," said Mr. Ferris, rising too, and standing full in front of her so that she could not escape, "I must know why you have gone on giving me every encouragement that a girl could give to a lover who had not explicitly declared himself, yes even to this very evening—is it that you love another? Or is it that you only wish to make a laughing stock of me?"

"I do not love another," said Eleanor trembling; "but," she added with a sudden burst of temper, for she was angry at his man-

ner, "there are other reasons which make it impossible that I should ever look upon Mr. Ferris otherwise than as an acquaintance and a man of business."

"I understand you," said he. One sudden spasm seemed almost to convulse his frame for a moment, it passed away as quickly. "I wish you joy Miss Leigh of your higher admirers—you have despised a heart that would have been worth having."

He bowed and left her; she sat down again on the seat from which she had risen, with an angry flush upon her cheek.

"Impertinent," she murmured, "what could make him presume to speak to me in this way."

She started, for Mr. Ferris was again at her side; she doubted whether he had overheard her angry exclamation.

"Pardon my presuming to speak to you, Miss Leigh," he said, "but I forgot to give you your cousin's message, that she will sit with my sister until supper is ready."

He turned and left her, and Eleanor, emerging from her seclusion when she felt sure every trace of her emotion had passed away, remained talking with Mrs. Bolton until Charles Stafford approached to lead her into the supper-room.

The dancing *broke out* afterwards with renewed spirit, and Eleanor took a malicious pride in letting James Ferris see how little the conversation with him had affected her spirits.

"Eleanor," said Maude to her after supper, "can you think what could be the matter with Mr. Ferris; when he came to take me in to supper his hand trembled like a leaf, and his face was white—he looked so changed."

"O! do not let us talk of Mr. Ferris, he is not worth troubling our heads about, Maude, an upstart lawyer—I hate lawyers."

"Hush, Eleanor, he is here quite close to us; I did not see him before, but I am afraid he heard."

"I do not care who heard me," said Eleanor, "least of all Mr. Ferris."



“Miss Ferne,” said he, approaching Maude without taking the slightest notice of Eleanor, “your mother is ready to go; may I hope that you will come again soon and see my poor sister, your society gives her so much pleasure.”

“I will gladly come,” said Maude; “she is so good and gentle, it is a pleasure to be with her. How you must love her, Mr. Ferris!”

“I do indeed,” he said, “and she thinks me worth loving.”

He accompanied them to the carriage, waited patiently while Mrs. Ferne readjusted her dress, wished them good bye, and then when all the guests had departed, when the lights were paled by the dawning day, James Ferris and Lucy were sitting in the bedroom of the latter, who was still in her evening attire. There was no sleep for either of them that night, tears were in Lucy’s eyes; but she whispered, “she was not worth the winning, dear James, if she could say that.”

## CHAPTER IV.

“ Love took up the glass of time and turned it in his glowing hands.

Every moment ; lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.’

THE day after the dance at Mrs. Ferris’s, Eleanor wandered about wearied and listless, listening eagerly to every footstep that approached. Her heart beat fast every time the door opened, for she had so entirely made up her mind that Mr. Stafford would call that morning to talk over the events of the ball, that she would not leave the garden for fear she should miss him. She pictured to herself the pleasure of hearing him confess that he did not admire Miss Bolton with all her gay ornaments

and fashionable toilette, half so much as he did one dark-eyed maiden in a simple white dress, and the wreath of pink hawthorn her only adornment. He had, it is true, told her so that night, but still she wished to hear it again; besides, she wished him to see that her beauty could charm as well in the full glare of daylight as beneath bright chandeliers, or in the softening shade of twilight, and so she had thought of him all the morning; she had dressed for him, in her prettiest muslin; for him she had seated herself in a graceful attitude; and by her side was a book he had chanced to admire: but all in vain, he came not! Often the book was taken up in a hurry as a horse's footstep was heard in the distance, and as often thrown down again in a pet.

For Eleanor had "a temper," and was far from being a model heroine. She was proud and impatient, and could ill bear contradiction. She had been very inquisitive, too, during the last few days, and had made many enquiries

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among her gossiping acquaintances in the neighbourhood. Report had, of course, said that Mr. Stafford was in love with Miss Bolton, and had also affirmed that he was wealthy and highly connected, indeed, himself not distantly related to an Earl; so Eleanor Leigh was well satisfied altogether, and contented to dream of Charles Stafford at her feet, and of herself awarding a graceful "Yes" to his petition. And of what was Charles Stafford thinking?

In a lonely walk, far from the house and out of sight of every one, he was pacing up and down with rapid steps, and troubled brow.

"Fool! madman that I am!" he muttered half aloud, "I, who am only just able to keep up the appearance of a gentleman; I, who must toil for years, aye, and perhaps even then never gain more than a bare competence. I must become so suddenly bewitched by this lovely creature! Madness! I must go back to

London at once, and there her fair face will for ever haunt me ! I shall never be able to settle down to business again ; but," he thought with a deep sigh, " it must be done ; had I a chance, a hope of better things, but it is folly to dream in this way ! I will not see her again !"

Long he walked there in the gloom of the thick trees, and when he returned to the house he announced, to the surprize of all, that he should be obliged to return to London the next day.

" A letter for you, Charles," said Mr. Bolton the next morning, as the party were gathered round the breakfast table.

" I hope its contents may induce you to alter your plan of leaving us to-day."

Charles Stafford opened the letter hastily, for he had recognized the handwriting of his cousin, the Earl of C—— and a flush of pleasure crossed his brow as he read it.

" Thanks for your advice, my friend," he

said as he put it into the hands of Mr. Bolton, then turning to Mrs. Bolton, he continued, "he offers me an appointment in Barbadoes."

With ready sympathy she held out her hand to her guest. "And must you go away from us all? Shall you accept it?"

"Indeed, my dear Mrs. Bolton, it is an offer which I most thankfully accept. An honourable position and a fair income are offered me; could I hesitate because I might have preferred some other employment? No, you know beggars must not be choosers. I shall write to my cousin immediately and thank him for his kind exertions on my behalf."

"But you need not leave us directly, Charles; you will stay longer, or else promise to come to us again before you leave England? Oh, my dear fellow, I cannot bear to think of you among those horrid blacks."

"Never mind the blacks," said Mr. Bolton, "but make haste, Charles, and make your fortune, and then come back and get some pretty

girl to share it with you, eh? Won't that be the thing?"

And Arabella said, "now, Mr. Stafford, you will be sure to fall in love with some lovely Creole before you have been in the Island a month; now, don't deny it, we know they are very bewitching, but mind, do not throw yourself away, take a little advice from your seniors, they think of nothing but how they can spend most money upon their dress, and how they can pass away their time most quickly."

"No—do not be caught by a pretty face," continued Mrs. Bolton, "whatever you do, beware of that; the girls of the present day are no better than idiots I declare, even in England, and what must they be in those out of the way places!"

Charles Stafford, having finished his letters, took an opportunity to make his escape, unquestioned, from the house. I must confess that his courage fell a little as he crossed the

hall, and he heard Mrs. Bolton's voice and Arabella's at a little distance, he made up his mind to be followed and questioned, asked if he preferred his own company, and at all events requested to go and look for Mr. Bolton and see that he was not getting his feet wet, or standing in a draught.

But fortune favoured him this time, the mother and daughter were only having one of their "little tiffs," and when that did take place their voices were very audible; so with one quiet glance he convinced himself that they were not in dangerous proximity, and stole down the steps into the shrubbery. Like a guilty man, he carefully avoided those corners where he would be most likely to catch sight of Mr. Bolton, and did not abate his watchfulness until he found himself beyond the bounds of the park and in the fields which formed a short cut to the town of Ashwell.

Then, for the first time he seemed to breathe freely, he moderated his pace and began to



think over his plans. First of all came his determination to see Eleanor Leigh, to tell her all, to ask if he might hope that she could learn to love him, that he might leave his native land, cheered by the hope that he might soon return and claim her hand. He saw, too, clearly, that there were difficulties in the way, he had to leave England so soon, but then he would not hurry her; if she could only tell him that her heart was free, and give him hope that in time he might be so happy as to find a place there.

And then Charles Stafford was not a vain man, but he did say to himself "what if that young artless heart be already won?"

She was evidently glad to see him at the dance at Ashwell, and then the remembrances that flashed across him brought a pleased smile to his face, and a conviction to his mind that if Eleanor Leigh did not already love him, it was probable that he might not have any very great difficulties to encounter before

she would own that she looked upon him as something more than a friend.

Fortune favoured him still, for, as he was returning from the town by a path which led in the direction of Mr. Ferne's cottage, his eye was caught by the flutter of a light dress amongst the trees before him. Yes! it was she whom he sought.

Eleanor Leigh was slowly walking with a book in her hand through the shady path, soft gleams of greeny-golden light flashing through the trees upon her graceful figure, and as Charles Stafford approached her, the flush of delicate rose that suffused her cheek, and the shy smile that sparkled in her eyes, rendered her beauty positively dazzling.

He felt his courage nearly sinking, but reflecting perhaps on the old adage which says that "faint heart never won fair lady," he said, after the first few words of friendly greeting,

"Miss Leigh I was on my way to Oak Cot-

tage to say good-bye," he stopped suddenly, for a shade that could not be mistaken, a look of sorrow passed over her countenance.

"And you are going to leave us, Mr. Stafford; we shall all miss you very much; this neighbourhood is just beginning to look its best; but perhaps you may be coming again in September, Mr. Bolton likes to have his house full then."

Miss Leigh spoke hurriedly and nervously, she had a sort of presentiment that it was no common good-bye which was to be said to her, and Mr. Stafford's embarrassed manner, and a something in his countenance, caused a slight flutter in her own heart.

In fact, Miss Leigh, from the first moment she had caught sight of Mr. Stafford approaching through the trees, had made up her mind that he would seize that golden opportunity and lay his heart at her feet; and perhaps we had better not say how Miss Leigh had lately evinced a new passion for

solitary walks; how often she had rambled alone to a pretty little hill a few fields off, from which a good view of the neighbouring field-paths might be obtained, and which particularly commanded the approaches from Bolton Park. It cannot be said with truth then, that she felt much surprize when the hero of her day dreams, the monarch at present of all her airy castles, suddenly assumed the character with which she had so long invested him.

“Miss Leigh,” he said, “I am going to leave—not Bolton Park only—but I am going to leave England, and I cannot go without learning my fate from your lips—may I carry with me the hope that you will accept the devotion of one who has loved you from the first moment he saw you.”

Now, every one of my readers can imagine so easily for themselves what more he said, how he told of the fears and uncertainties which had caused him to come to the dreadful resolution of tearing himself away from a

neighbourhood so dangerous to his peace—how that morning's post had changed all—that we will not insult their imagination by relating it—and then he told her he knew quite well that he was the most selfish of mortals, that he ought to have waited—waited perhaps—the idea was too dreadful, till some rival had stepped in and wooed and won the fair hand he then clasped in his own—but could it be expected that he should run such a risk, and go away without trying to win a promise that he might come back some day and claim the loveliest girl in England for his own dear wife?

And Eleanor looked shyly up at him with those splendid dark eyes, and did not withdraw the little slender white hand he had taken in his own, and, in short, she did not say *no*.

Mrs. Ferne's dinner waited full half an hour that day, and Mr. Ferne was very cross because the potatoes were boiled to pieces, the

cold mutton luckily could not be spoiled, and Charles Stafford walked back to Bolton Park with a quick and buoyant step and a heart proud and happy, full of courage and energy to set out upon a new career, and folded neatly in a small piece of paper in a little pocket on the left hand side of his waistcoat was a thick curl of long silky black hair.

“Maude, darling, come out with me,” and Eleanor twined her arm in that of her cousin on the evening of that eventful day, and led her out in the soft summer twilight.

“Maude, you cannot go out without your hat, really you must not be so careless, I found it under the large lime tree this morning, you will find it in my room, and really I do not approve of your going out so late in the evening, when you have a muslin dress on, the damp takes all the starch out, and it is terribly expensive.”

Mrs. Ferne shook her head and groaned, as Eleanor, heedless of muslins, half-dragged on the hesitating Maude.

"You must come, Maude, I have a great deal to say to you, something very particular—."

"What is it, Eleanor?"

"Can you guess?"

And Eleanor stopped suddenly at the end of the gravel walk and facing her cousin, looked merrily at her under her long eyelashes,

"Has he—Have you?" said Maude, hesitating.

"Yes, my dear, he has, and I have; that is to say—in the language of ordinary mortals—Mr. Stafford has made me an offer, and I have accepted him."

"O Eleanor, so soon!"

"Plenty of time, Maude, he fell in love with me the first time he saw me; and you know Mrs. Matthews boasts that the third time she saw Mr. Matthews was when he put the ring upon her finger."

"O do not speak of them, dear—they are not happy, and you, you must be happy as

the day is long, or what would become of me?" and she kissed her cousin affectionately.

"Yes, Maude, and I intend to be very happy. Mr. Stafford is not rich now, and you know I always intended to marry a rich man, but he is going to be rich, he has just had a good appointment given him in Barbadoes, and his cousin, the Earl of C—, will be sure to do a great deal for him. He will have to sail in a few weeks, and when he has arranged everything and found a good house he will come back."

"Yes, and fetch you, Eleanor. How we shall all miss you."

"You had better come out to me in a few years, Maude, and I have no doubt you could make a good match out there, I should know everybody, and would soon marry you off."

Maude laughed, it did not enter her head that her cousin was speaking seriously—  
"And she married her sisters to two great lords of her court.' Thank you, dear Cinderella."



"But now, Maude I want you to tell my Aunt, I do not like to do so myself, she and my Uncle were so angry at my being late for dinner."

"Yes, I know they were vexed," said poor Maude, "I went twice to look for you, but of course you could not tell how time went while he was talking to you"—

And Maude felt strangely inclined to sigh, she thought such a *tête-à-tête* must be very pleasant, for she looked up to Mr. Stafford herself with a kind of awe, and thought how delightful it must be to talk to him, if she was like Eleanor, and was not too shy or too frightened to answer him.

It would be difficult to analyse Eleanor's thoughts after Maude had left her as she slowly paced up and down the gravel walk. We suppose she felt happy, at all events she was proud of her conquest, proud that a man so handsome, so clever, and so generally agreeable, had owned the power of her beauty and acknowledged himself her slave. To this

must be added a pleasing sense of triumph at having gained the prize for which her richer neighbour, Arabella Bolton, had been trying in vain. To have disappointed her, that was something and she gloried in it; but then came the thought.

“After all, I am afraid it will not be a really good match, if I had better opportunities, but I am so shut up here—I see so few people—It will be different, though, in Barbadoes, then of course we shall be in the first society, and when we come home I daresay the Earl will get something better for us, and of course we shall become acquainted with him.”

And so her thoughts ran on, building castles in the air, not of true love and womanly devotion, not planning how her love and watchfulness should lighten the toils and diminish the cares of the partner of her choice, but, alas that it must be told, looking upon the man to whom she had pledged her faith rather in the light of a stepping stone to rank and

fortune, and the great object of her ambition—a brilliant position in society.

She lingered long in the garden, feeling disinclined to exchange the balmy air of the summer night for the close atmosphere of the house, whose windows had all been tightly closed hours ago for fear of moths, special bugbears of Mrs. Ferne's, at last, however, in the dusk, Maude found her, laid her hand gently in hers, and whispered,

“Come in, dear Eleanor, they know all, and they are pleased, for they like Mr. Stafford very much, they are only sorry that you will have to go so far away.”

Eleanor received the congratulations of her uncle and aunt somewhat haughtily—it seemed as if she held her head an inch or two higher than the day before—and she endured with some impatience a lecture from Mr. Ferne upon the imprudence of staying out in the night air in such a miserable climate as that of England; which lecture then diverged to

Barbadoes, with a catalogue of the principal diseases most prevalent in hot climates, and the precautions which must always be adopted.

“ Before Mr. Stafford goes, Eleanor, you remind me to make out a careful list of all the things he must not eat, however, it may be a safe rule for him to remember, without burdening his memory, that plain joints, roasted or boiled, and rice, *very* well boiled, are the only things he must take.”

Charles Stafford and Eleanor had agreed that for the present their engagement was to be kept secret. Maude alone, and Mr. and Mrs. Ferne were to know of it, so Charles Stafford felt glad that he had not to break the news to his friends, the Boltons, to whom some secret consciousness told him it would be most distasteful. As it was, the idea that he was actually going to accept an appointment in a foreign land, which he certainly would not have done if he had entertained any thought of her, gave Arabella Bolton a

severe fit of ill humour. She did not appear at dinner, and when, after some sending of messages backwards and forwards and mysterious telegraphs, winks, and nods, on the part of her mother, she made her appearance in the drawing room at tea, it was with eyes most suspiciously red, and a temper highly irritable. First, the room was too hot, then, when her father opened the door,

“Was she to catch her death of cold, she should like to know? she supposed because she made no fuss about her health, like some people, it was never to be considered! O no, it did not matter, but her mother knew quite well she always caught cold when she sat near an open door.”

“Why, my dear, it was only yesterday you sat by the open window till much later.”

“Window, papa! who mentioned a window? I said an open door.”

“Come, my dear, and sit on this sofa; here you will be out of every draught.”

“Thank you, mamma, I think I know my

own feelings best; and I will thank you to leave me alone. Thank goodness I am not obliged to live in hot climates, how people can exist there I cannot imagine! Mr. Stafford will be burnt coffee colour before we see him again."

"O, my dear young friend!" burst out Mrs. Bolton, her eyes filling with tears, "do be careful of yourself. I had a cousin once who went to Africa—just such another; and the wicked creatures, I always shall believe they poisoned him—with his delicate stomach, horrid messes and things, grease, and rice, and palm oil I've no doubt."

"I was half afraid," said Mr. Bolton, "that you were inclined to lose your heart to the 'Beauty of Norrington;' it is very lucky you were wiser than I gave you credit for, Charles. You have a fine prospect now before you, and with your abilities and the opening now given you, you will soon be at the top of the tree."

“Eleanor Leigh!” interrupted Mrs. Bolton.  
“No, Mr. Stafford has better taste than to admire her. Mr. Bolton, you ought not to put such things into his head.”

And starting up, she folded her hands in an attitude of affected helplessness, and with her head on one side, began, what was intended to be, an imitation of Miss Leigh’s fine lady manners.

“O! Mrs. Bolton, do you see to your house-keeping yourself, I thought you had a house-keeper?” Then, in her natural voice: “Yes, Miss Leigh, I *have*; but because my husband allows me a housekeeper, is that any reason why I should let him be cheated out of half of everything that comes into his kitchen.”

It was a myth that Mr. Bolton was the moving spirit of everything. A harmless fiction, so far as it might tend to give perfect strangers the idea that he was a very decided and energetic man, blessed with a wonderfully meek and obedient helpmate. But to those

who were aware of the real state of the case the effect was somewhat ludicrous, to hear every extraordinarily severe scolding, every cutting reprimand, given in the name of the poor squire, who, everybody knew, was the most easy to be pleased of any man living.

This is a little digression *en passant*, and we must return to Mrs. Bolton, who resumed her seat and began to favour her "dear young friend" with a few prognostications of the trials and troubles that awaited him in Barbadoes.

I do not believe that Charles Stafford heard much of what she had been saying. Lost in a happy reverie, he was wandering again in thought by the side of that tinkling stream, among those shady trees, and there was the figure—the graceful figure of Eleanor, his own, his promised bride. And then his fancy took a long flight across the seas, and he saw in a bright vision himself with the same sweet face at his side, wandering with her among "feathery palm trees and over coral sands;"



and Mrs. Bolton's bodings of evil only mingled in the web of his thoughts, and led them off into a tropical version of "John Anderson, my Jo."

Soon after breakfast on the following morning, waiting only till she saw her cousin safely settled at her morning's employment, Eleanor Leigh took her shady hat from a peg in the hall, sauntered slowly down the gravel walk, opened the little green gate, and turned into the fields. Across the fields, all golden with bright buttercups, under the shady trees, into a little lane, so narrow, that it was a wonder how the great waggons ever contrived to carry their rich loads through it to Farmer Brooks' yard. Presently the sounds appertaining to farmyards made themselves heard, and Eleanor's appearance at the gate was the signal for a great commotion amongst the live stock of all kinds, a great rush of little pigs first, to look at her through the bars of their department, then a tossing up of queer little

noses, and a rush back again, and last, not least, a barking of half a dozen dogs of all shapes and sizes, which quickly brought the "missus" to the scene of action.

Mrs. Brooks had been for many years a favourite servant of Mrs. Leigh's; she had nursed Eleanor in her childhood, and still considered herself as quite one of the family, and as she had no children of her own, she was still free to lavish much of her affection upon her old pet, of whose beauty she was almost as proud as a mother could have been.

Mrs. Brooks, a fine, handsome woman, who looked as if she lived among the good things of this world, and had little to trouble her, came forward, quickly, when she saw Eleanor, bestowing a cuff, not a hard one however, right and left, on the dogs who were most noisy.

"Ye stupid things, don't ye know better than to bark at Miss Eleanor! I haven't seen you this fortnight, Miss. I hope you're come

to stop a bit! Now come in and sit down quiet."

Huntley Farm was old and grey, and the thick walls were covered with honeysuckles and roses, which peeped in at the windows of the pleasant little parlour, into which Mrs. Brooks led her guest.

"Now, Miss Eleanor, you see I am making John a waistcoat, just one for work; he's always ruining his waistcoats; so I'll go on with it while you're talking."

"Yes, do go on with your work, for I have a great deal to talk to you about to-day."

"That's right, Miss—I love to hear the sound of your voice; but I hope you're well, and all your folks. Miss Maude, I suppose, couldn't find time to come with you?"

"Indeed, Sarah, I did not ask her; I wished to come by myself. I came to tell you," she added, after a moment's pause, "that I am going to be married."

"You, Miss Eleanor, and I not heard no-

thing of it! Who is it to?" and down went the work. "Not to Mr. Ferris?"

"Mr. Ferris, indeed! I should think not; he ought to know his place better than to think of me. No, it is to Mr. Stafford, a friend of Mr. Bolton's;" And then Eleanor described him—hair and eyes—face and figure, *connections* and prospects.

I have especially noticed *connections*, because the Earl of C. figured so conspicuously in the little history, and the "prospects" were purposely left rather vague and misty, as it were, perhaps, because Eleanor knew that everything looks larger through a mist, perhaps because she was well aware that Mrs. Brooks was a person of vivid imagination; and she was well pleased to let it expand itself on that subject.

"Well, I don't know," said Mrs. Brooks, thoughtfully, after they had been talking over our poor hero for about a quarter of an hour, "I don't know after all, whether I'm glad or sorry!"

"Oh, Sarah, what do you mean? You have been so often wishing me to be married."

"Yes, Miss, so I do still. I should like you to have a house of your own, and be independent like; but—"

"But what is it then," said Eleanor, impatiently; "have you anything to say against Mr. Stafford?"

"Nothing at all against him, Miss, but I can't help feeling a little disappointed. I was in hopes you would have done better. If it had been Miss Maude, now, it would have done very well; but I did hope my beautiful Miss Eleanor would have been a great lady, somehow or other. I should like you to drive about in your carriage, and have your grand parties, and your picnics, and all your friends envying of you, and you a holding up your head, not to say proud, but just haughty, like, and now you'll be going off to them horrid places beyond the seas! I can't bear to think of it!" and she leant her head on the table for a moment to hide her tears.

Eleanor's brow was a little clouded as she answered, "But, Sarah, how was I to meet with any one better in this stupid place, you would not have me marry any of the Ashwell gentlemen, would you? And how am I see any one, so shut up as I am—my Uncle and Aunt never ask a creature to their house, and of course we scarcely ever go out anywhere. What can they think will become of Maude if they keep her shut up in this way?"

"Poor Miss Maude! but she'll make herself happy anyhow. She ain't like you, she's so quiet like, and I don't think she's a bit jealous of you, because you get admired so much more. La! now Miss let me tell you. 'Twas only last Saturday John was standing in the Dolphin yard at Ashwell and two gentlemen as was going by (and they *was* real gentlemen I can tell you) stopped to ask him who that beautiful young lady was who had just stepped out of the draper's shop, and John looked and told them 'twas Miss Leigh—and

then one gentleman said to the other, 'twas the tallest, he said it to, and the handsomest by a deal, but then the other had the beautifullest mustachers and was reg'lar genteel, holding his head up so straight like. 'Well' says he—'if that gal' you'll excuse my being so free, Miss Eleanor—but 'twas the words he said—'if that gal was in London she'd be the beauty of the day, I've seen none so handsome this season, my lord'—yes—he said my lord, and John went in when they was gone and asked about them—and they was Sir Andrew Bolton and Lord Thornbury."

Miss Leigh listened, half ashamed at the interest she felt, and asked what could have brought Lord Thornbury and Sir Andrew Bolton to Ashwell.

"I can't say, Miss—but as Sir Andrew is to have Bolton Park after the Squire, I suppose he likes to come and have a look at it now and then."

"You know I tell you everything, Sarah,

and I can trust you. Mr. Stafford and I do not wish our engagement to be known at present for several reasons, it may be a long one," and she blushed.

"Yes, much better, Miss Eleanor, I'll never speak of it to nobody, 'tis much better it should be kept quite a secret, there's no knowing, people's minds may change."

The last words were said in an under tone, and after again requiring and receiving a promise of secrecy, Eleanor turned homewards. Slowly, thoughtfully, she walked along, the words of Mrs. Brooks still sounding in her ears. "I thought you would have done better."

They chimed in but too well with some words of her own, which she scarcely dare acknowledge even to herself; she had tried to stifle them, but they would make themselves heard somehow or other.

The next fortnight passed away all too quickly in the first brightness of "Love's young dream," and Mrs. Brooks' words were



forgotten as Eleanor sat by the side of Charles Stafford under the shady chestnut, or wandered with him through all her favourite haunts, listened to the sweet words of a deep and true affection—an affection which surrounded its object with a halo of brightness, and invested her with every virtue, every high and noble sentiment. And as she listened, she thought surely her lot was bright indeed to be so loved, so worshipped by such a man—and they talked and dreamed until Eleanor Leigh felt, or fancied she felt, as sorrowful as he did at the thoughts of the parting which must come in the course of a few days.

## CHAPTER V.


I never spoke the word farewell,  
But with an utterance faint and broken,  
A heart-sick yearning for the time  
When it shall never more be spoken.

WE will not waste time and space in recording the hopes and fears, which chased each other in Charles Stafford's breast, as he tossed over the waves of the surging sea, whose varied sounds ever suggest such vivid imaginings to the human heart, and how much more to a departing lover; but we will leave him to the usual amount of smiles and sighs, unless we sympathize in some measure with his regrets in having somewhat hastily accepted an appointment, which removed him

so far from the sphere of the one bright star of his future life, and we will content ourselves in the fact of his arrival in Barbadoes after a most prosperous voyage.

Meanwhile, how has Eleanor been affected by the parting? That word so full of anguish! How has that young girl's heart borne up under the reality of what loomed so mournfully in its approach?


A bright August sun poured full into the window of her snug little dormitory the morning after those sad adieux, but found Eleanor still in deep repose, as sleep had not visited her eyes until after the first faint streaks of dawn were visible. Then came a reprieve to those ever recurring thoughts, a series of reflections ever ending in the same point, and no wonder when that point was of such vital importance to her future life—so can it be a matter of surprize that sleep should be banished for so many weary hours? Each scene of meeting was revisited in thought.



Again she listened to each word he uttered; and recalled each dear look of affection? And how easy seemed the task of constancy in those first hours of separation.

When she awoke, Maude was standing by her bed side, with her breakfast nicely arranged in a neat little tray, and Eleanor started up to deprecate the idea of needing such indulgence, but smiled on discovering how late it was, and the inexpediency of delaying the family breakfast until her toilette was completed, so she gladly accepted her cousin's kind attention; and at eleven o'clock made her appearance down stairs, and to Mr. and Mrs. Ferne's great satisfaction, she entered the room smiling brightly, and full of apologies for having overslept herself.

Her aunt gave her a note, which had just arrived, to read, containing an invitation to an Archery Picnic, in Bolton Park, for the Thursday in the next week, the archery to be followed by boating on the lake, and a



dance in the evening for all who liked to remain.

Mrs. Ferne watched her niece's countenance as she perused the note with some interest, as doubtful whether Eleanor would adopt the line of partial seclusion, which many young ladies assume when their fate is sealed, or whether her former love of gaiety was still unquenched. It seems that it had lost none of its charms, and Mrs. Ferne was less surprised than Maude, when Eleanor quickly exclaimed :—

“Oh! aunt, it will be charming, we must go; and I hope you will give Maude a green jacket just like mine. Mary Anne Long can make one from my pattern as easily as possible, and with her double skirted white muslin, and her Swiss hat trimmed with fern, we can come out just alike, and in orthodox archery costume; won't it be fun, Maude?”

“I have do doubt it will be very pleasant, dear Eleanor,” was Maude's less enthusiastic

reply, as she could scarcely understand her cousin, in having so speedily regained her usual composure of demeanour under her peculiar circumstances, and much less such eagerness to enter into scenes of gaiety, when in her own case, her thoughts would have ever been pursuing that smoky steamer over the trackless waves on its cruel outward course, and a complete indifference to all, besides the hero of her dreams would have been the natural consequence; but perhaps Eleanor is right, she thought, as one owes duties to others, and her talents ought not to remain in the shade the best years of her life.

Mrs. Ferne wrote an acceptance of the invitation, and the intervening afternoons were regularly spent by the two girls in practising with the bows and arrows, and renewing their own skill before the target until the gala day arrived.

Maude made by far the best score, indeed, her miniature target was so fully dotted over

with the numerous piercings, that Mrs. Ferne felt some degree of pride in seeing her dressed like her cousin as they stepped into the pony carriage which was to convey them to Bolton Park ; although much of Eleanor's coaxing had been requisite to achieve the "unnecessary expense" of the green jacket for the occasion—but suppose she were to win !

The skies were cloudless and a gentle breeze stirring, just enough to prevent an excess of heat without interfering with the straight flight of the arrows, and the day seemed made for the occasion.

The cousins were in high spirits during their drive, and on arriving at the scene of action they found the rest of the party assembled and ready to begin. Arabella Bolton, in gorgeous array, cast a supercilious glance on the affected simplicity—(as she pleased to term it)—of the cousins' dress, and expressed her delight in seeing Miss Leigh in such excellent spirits, thinking it a pity that such first-

rate skill as she was prepared to witness should be too late to add to her other attractions where she would have wished to make an impression.


Having thus relieved her conscience, she fell into the line of the toxopholites, and the excitement of the day began in good earnest. How many of the arrows took "aim the archer never meant" it would be invidious to our fair countrymen and women to say, even if they could be counted; however, the target was fairly strawn, and one of Maude's arrows graced the very centre of the gold, which was a hopeful beginning.

Mr. Hastings, the rector of Norrington, to which parish Oak Cottage belonged, came up to offer congratulations to the somewhat timid Maude, who received them gracefully but shyly; and throughout the afternoon her good success continued.

Eleanor shot fairly, but was not too decidedly successful to throw Arabella Bolton's



more true, but less graceful, archery into the shade ; and this saved poor Eleanor from many shafts of satire and sarcasm, which, as a more eclipsing rival she would assuredly have received, from a more poignant weapon than the bow, one which propelled more envenomed shafts. A band of music was stationed within the ruins of an old castle, which ornamented the grounds of the fine old park, and their enlivening strains prevented the many spectators from growing weary of watching the flight of arrows, and sustained the spirits of those whose will and eye so often failed to guide their shafts to their proper destination. At length the twelve double ends were finished, and as the two clerical scorers retired to make up their tables, each of the archers counted their private score, and it required not Lavater's skill to perceive in which countenances the most hope reigned, and which were the most eager to hear how the prizes were awarded.



Not long had the expectants to wait, suppressed exclamations of "Here they come!" "Who is queen of the fête?" "What will the prizes be?" and short but earnest enquiries as the umpires slowly advanced, were checked by Mr. Hastings coming up to Maude, and with some emphasis saying:

"Miss Ferne, it gives me great pleasure to present you, in the name of the Bolton Archery Club, with the first prize;" at the same time placing a curiously shaped morocco leather case in her hand.

One more *au fait* in ornaments would instantly have guessed its contents from its shape; but Maude did not wait to speculate, but touching the spring, a handsome gold bracelet was discovered within, the fastening being most tastily and cleverly arranged in the form of a bow and arrow, resting on a target of gold.

Maude's eyes glistened with delight, and Eleanor came forward with sincere rejoicing

written on every feature. I wish we could say that each fair countenance bore the same expression, but alas ! for poor human nature, and we must not be severe upon her.

Mr. Gregory, the curate of a neighbouring parish, then singled out Mr. Ferris as the recipient of the first gentleman's prize, a handsome gold pencil case ; the gentleman received his honours with all due modesty.

The second ladies' prize, consisting of three painted arrows, fell to a young lady who was visiting in the neighbourhood, and so ended the archery.

Refreshments having been prepared on some impromptu tables, under, or rather within a circle of cedar trees—patriarchal trees second to none in the kingdom, forming quite a study for the artists' pencil ; all the party at length arranged themselves to their satisfaction, and ample justice was done to the hospitality and taste displayed by the purveyor of the feast, and merriment reigned

supreme, aided by sparkling champagne, in which the health of the victoresses and the victor was pledged.

The sinking sun as reflected on the lake below, looked indeed tempting, and it did not take long to fill the boat with ladies, who sang through all the aquatic glees and songs they could remember ere the last ray deserted the surface of the water, when prudence suggested a return to land. All the ladies had safely stepped on shore, excepting Eleanor, whose thoughts had been wandering from the placid lake to the mighty ocean, and who perhaps was sorry to have her reverie disturbed by any change of position; and just as she had awakened to reality and placed her foot on the bank, a lurch of the boat caused her to fall backwards into the water. The splash produced a scream from all the safely-landed party, and Mr. Selby plunged in and placed her securely on the bank, but in a more deplorable state of dripping than even her.

most jealous rival could have desired. Everyone crowded round with offers of assistance, but she preferred a rapid drive home to any other alternative, though deemed by many the extremity of imprudence. Mr. Selby insisted on her taking a seat in his carriage, which chanced to be ready to start, as he had an appointment in Ashwell, and of this she gladly availed herself, little dreaming of the satisfaction it afforded Mr. Selby to place her under even a slight obligation to him. A heart less impressionable than Eleanor's might have acknowledged the quiet but unmistakable devotion of his manner, which her late perilous position had given him courage to manifest, but which had for some months lain smouldering on, quite unconscious of the pre-occupied state of Eleanor's heart, and deceived into something like hope by her warm, friendly manner. He felt that her hearty expressions of gratitude to him would follow him in many a solitary drive; and when, on reaching the

door of Oak Cottage, she held out her ungloved hand to say good bye, a gentle pressure restored the bloom to her cheek, which her most uncomfortably wet condition had previously chased away.

He turned his horse's head towards Ashwell, bright hopes dancing before his dazzled eyes, and looking forward to the imperative *duty* of enquiring for his fair charge the next day, malgré, the seven miles of road which lay between his father's house—West Dean Lodge and Oak Cottage.

Mrs. Ferne rushed to the door, to hear the reason of Eleanor's unexpected appearance; and a sketch of the accident was rapidly given, with an assurance that Maude had been left in the good care of Miss Hastings, who had promised to return in the pony carriage with her as soon as it could be got ready.

Eleanor retired to her room, and to bed, without any feeling of regret that the accident had cut short the close of the entertainment

on her own account, and being sure of equal indifference to dancing on Maude's part.

Within half an hour from the time of her own arrival at home, the sound of wheels was heard on the drive, and in a very few minutes Maude appeared, carrying a tumbler of hot wine and water, with many suggestive remedies from Mr. Ferne, for the prevention of cold after Eleanor's involuntary "packing," as he was as yet a sceptic as to the virtues of hydropathy; and merrily the girls laughed as they talked over the adventure of the day.

"Maude, dear," said Eleanor, "are you quite sure that Mr. Hastings had not a double pleasure in offering the prize to its fair winner?"

"Oh! Eleanor, how can you dream of such ideas even; Mr. Hastings is one who should be far removed from suspicions of that sort, and you know how much I am associated with

him, in one way and another, and, as a clergyman, that I should be sorry indeed, if I thought you really meant anything by such a remark."

"Why, how sensitive my usually placid cousin is to night!" observed Eleanor; but on seeing a shade on her brow, quickly added — "but it was only a passing thought, and perhaps a wish, dear Maude, and pray do not take it so seriously, if I promise never to offend again."

Maude's serenity quickly returned, as she calmly observed that such wanderings of imagination would be likely to destroy the present freedom of manner existing between Mr. Hastings and herself, in their frequent meetings in the school and parish, which caused Eleanor to smile inwardly, as she remembered her timid reception of the morocco case, that very afternoon.

"And what did my uncle and aunt say to your beautiful bracelet, Maude? I am really



half inclined to be envious of its splendour."

"Oh! they were as delighted, or more so, than I was, and nothing would satisfy papa, until I had fastened it on my wrist, in proof that it was perfectly loose, and so incapable of in any way impeding the circulation, which was so injurious to many young ladies."

"Dear uncle, the want of change of scene, and thought, fills his mind with all sorts of fancies; but what did my aunt say?"

"No, Eleanor, I cannot tell you, as you would only laugh, and say that she cannot understand my not being still in the long clothes of infancy."

"Oh! I can guess," said Eleanor; "she wanted to keep it locked up for you in her jewel case. Confess I am right."

A merry laugh followed, and after severe criticism of the various members of the archery party on Eleanor's part, with attempts to smooth off the too keen edges of her re-

marks on Maude's, the cousins exchanged "good night;" but no sooner had Eleanor laid her head on the pillow, than the door re-opened, and Maude again entered, bearing a letter, which had arrived by the second post that day, but which had been previously forgotten in the excitement of the accident, and of Maude's archery honours.


"A letter for me?" exclaimed Eleanor. "Oh, it is only from that tiresome Miss Andrews, about sending her the trimming for my mantle; it would have kept till to-morrow."

"I fancy the writing is rather too gentlemanlike for poor Miss Andrews," observed Maude, smilingly. "And she does not put her notes into crested envelopes."

Eleanor was full of excitement in a moment, and the rapidly changing colour on her cheek, as she opened the envelope, satisfied Maude as to the reality of her cousin's affection for the writer.

A lucky meeting with another ship, homeward bound, had enabled Charles Stafford to send back a letter, which accounted for Eleanor's receiving it so soon after his departure, and short though the letter was, how many times it was read and re-read, before it was placed under her pillow. All the events of the day sunk into oblivion, and nothing remained in Eleanor's memory but those sweet assurances of eternal affection—those earnest hopes of constancy to meet such previously unheard-of devotion, and all the usual hyperbole of such strains, so new to Eleanor in writing, though so eloquently expressed in words and looks in those parting interviews; but who is ignorant of the effect of first seeing these rhapsodies on paper! How true it is that words melt into thin air, and ascend into the regions of space, but when those words are written, how indelible they become.

To follow Eleanor's reflections through the next two or three hours would be to retrace



the experience of most of my readers, so let them recall their feelings on such occasions ; but had Mr. Selby possessed a magic looking-glass how many airy structures might have been saved, and how little hope would have been mirrored on its surface for him. But it is well for us that our vision is so bounded, or how should we gather that experience so necessary for the discipline of life ; moreover life would be denuded of half its charms were we banished for ever from the regions of fancy and mystery, so leaving these two dreamers in the midst of their reveries, we will return to Maude and her parents in the drawing room, as she relates the events of the day.

Tom had so many questions to ask, and so much to tell his sister of the occurrences of the home life during the few hours of her absence, that supper time arrived unheeded, though not by any means unneeded, by Maude, who for the first time remembered that she

had missed the usual early tea, for which she had returned too late, so that in spite of many fatherly warnings as to the danger of completely satisfying hunger after a comparative fast, both brother and sister did ample justice to the wholesome but plain fare before them, and they did not apparently suffer from any ill effects.

Mr. and Mrs. Ferne had contented themselves with wine and biscuits, which their children dutifully carried into the drawing room before settling down to their own more substantial repast; and Tom took this opportunity of finding himself alone with his sister to enlist her sympathies in a point of difficulty he had to struggle through.

The boys at Ashwell School were bent on getting up one of Shakespeare's plays, and as, in spite of idleness in the way of lessons, Tom's memory was retentive, and he possessed a certain amount of unblushing confidence in recital, he had been requested to take the

part of Jessica in the Merchant of Venice, but unless he could secure the promise of a suitable dress by the beginning of November, when the scene was to come off, (it being arranged as a celebration of Dr. Hudson, the head master's, birth-day,) it would be useless, as each actor had to provide his own wardrobe.

Maude entered warmly into the idea, and only hoped her favourite Shakespeare would not be wholly murdered in such juvenile hands, which aroused some indignation in the mind of the school-boy.

"Oh! Maude, that is just like you girls, fancying no one can represent your pet heroes and heroines but grown-up men and women; but I hope you will be obliged to confess your mistake, as all the boys will of course be allowed to invite their own relations to the 'Private Theatricals' of Ashwell School."

"And I will gladly do my part both in acknowledging the merit of the splendid performance, as well as in racking my brain, and

making Eleanor do the same, in the way of fitting out Jessica for the encounter," chimed in Maude, merrily.

"Do, there's a dear good girl, and I do not think that jolly new bracelet of yours would come in amiss in the way of ornament, it would set off my brown wrist wonderfully," added Tom with a mischievous glance at his sister.

"Oh! Tom how can you imagine my first valuable piece of ornament could be placed in such imminent peril of destruction, or at least of being lost in the green room?"

Tom had evidently been deep in the study of the Merchant of Venice, and seemed quite *au fait* at the outline of the plot, and quite ready to devote himself *con amore* to learning the parts which would fall to his share, and so engrossed had they become in discussing the scheme in hand that the sound of the church clock striking ten, reminded them that their father and mother would be wondering

at their prolonged absence—up they started, with an understanding that the subject of the needed robes should be brought on the tapis the next morning at breakfast time, when Tom shrewdly suggested certain economical objections on his mother's part.

Maude's position was a delicate one in regard to the peculiarities and foibles of both parents, as with all filial affection for them, she could not blind herself to such glaring defects, and though never willingly referring to them herself, and indeed trying to screen them as much as possible from observation in general, she could not lower her own standard of feeling in direct defence of such painful narrow-mindedness, nor could she always parry the less scrupulous remarks of her school boy brother, though ever ready to remind him that every one has their failings and weaknesses, some in one way, and some in another, and in entreating him to remember the many excellent traits in each parent which



our readers will have perceived, lay more in the daughter's hopes and imagination than in reality. However, there was no fear of either Maude or Tom falling into the same errors in their future life, and the warm affection subsisting between the brother and sister was a source of infinite pleasure to Maude, and of the greatest use to Tom, over whom her influence was almost unbounded, though not fully acknowledged to be so by him, and scarcely felt to be so by herself.

The next morning during the eight o'clock breakfast, Tom's fidgets seemed unusually strong upon him.

"Now, Tom, can't you sit still? I am sure that carpet will never bear such fidgetting with your chair—not one moment has it been still since he sat down," said Mrs. Ferne.

Poor Tom, somewhat crest fallen, sat erect on his chair, when Maude came to the rescue.

"Oh! mamma, Tom has a little plan to

confess to you, and his extreme anxiety for your approval makes him so fidgetty."

"What is it, Tom? Anything to relieve that poor carpet. Let me hear what you want now?"

Tom reddened and began to explain, and before Mrs. Ferne had time to express horror or even astonishment, at the idea of Maude's lending him a dress for the occasion, Eleanor joined in with—

"I've got the very thing for you, Tom, spangles and all, a black velvet boddice, and the upper skirt of an old pink silk dress, and if you will come up to my room after breakfast we will look out all the etcetras."

Mrs. Ferne looked somewhat dismayed as her niece so freely offered to equip the young actor, but as it entirely relieved her mind on the subject of Maude's wardrobe, she could not withhold her consent.

Tom thanked his cousin warmly, and Mr. Ferne added his hopes that he should be ex-

empted from facing the horrors of an over heated apartment, when the exhibition came off, winding up with a dissertation on the numerous diseases contracted in any crowded assembly, and enlarging fully on the pernicious effects of the want of pure oxygen, especially under the influence of gas.

When the meal was ended, the promised inspection took place in Eleanor's room, which soon bore the appearance of a milliner's shop, drawers ransacked, flower boxes emptied, feathers strewn here and there, ribbons, lace and ornaments recklessly scattered in all directions—and there was no doubt that a Jessica, and if it had been necessary, two or three Jessicas might have been furnished out of the materials produced, so Tom bounded down the stairs to set off to school that morning in buoyant spirits, though not until Maude had more than once reminded him that the pony carriage had been waiting for him some minutes in the stable-yard.

Eleanor soon set her disordered room to rights, and sat down to collect her thoughts for writing, as her heart was still too full of last night's dispatch, and its consequent thoughts, to make any other occupation than that of answering it distasteful.


Ah! Eleanor, may you long retain your present overflowing feelings for the object of those prettily turned sentences, that tasty writing. Beware of hidden dangers, and do not let your present apparent safety make you unwary. Dreams of ambition may revisit you when you are least on your guard. Absence may strengthen affection, but do not forget that in some cases it has precisely an opposite effect. Beware!

## CHAPTER VI.

It is the little rift within the lute,  
That by and by will make the music mute,  
And ever widening, slowly silence all.

TENNYSON.

THE latter end of August, and the first three weeks of September have passed away without any particular variation in the daily routine of life in Oak Cottage, for, as those accustomed to country life well know, adventures are not to be met with every day. So much the better—as leading to a more full appreciation of them when they do occur to vary the monotony, and as giving more time for the substantial features to be carried out, of which Maude, at least, was ever ready to take advantage.



Her mornings were usually spent in some historical, or biographical reading; and after the usual early dinner, either a walk, or a drive took up the chief part of the afternoon; or when Mrs. Ferne and Eleanor went out together in the pony carriage, Maude gladly took advantage of her freedom, to pay visits amongst her poorer neighbours, in whose cottages her presence was ever welcomed with delight.

One morning of every week she spent at the school; though this work was scarcely incumbent on her, as Margaret Hastings was a daily visitor there, being in every way entirely devoted to good works in her brother's parish.

Of Eleanor's daily pursuits we cannot speak so definitely, though her mornings were usually spent in the retirement of her own room. Letter writing was her favourite occupation, and the last new novel might usually be seen within reach. Fancy work, and

a regular practice of her singing, filled up the time ; and this helped to keep off the *ennui* she would certainly have experienced otherwise, in so limited a sphere, though I must do her the justice to add, that when called upon, she was ever ready with her purse, to assist Maude in her schemes of charity, or to accompany her in her parochial visitings.

Letters from Charles arrived with tolerable regularity every mail, which were as regularly answered, and she esteemed herself happy as the *fiancée* of one who had been so much admired and sought after as Charles Stafford, but in reality how slight was their acquaintance with each other ! How feeble at present must the roots of the love of which he was worthy in her soul, though a bright blossom had so rapidly shot up into existence on their brief acquaintance. Will those delicate fibres support that long stalk with its radiant head, or is the slightest tendency to

drooping already visible? It surely can be only in our fancy, and do not let us even imagine it as the shadow of the future.

The harvest had indeed been a glorious one, both as regarded the produce, and in its lovely sunshine, and, as usual Michaelmas Day had been fixed upon for the day of thanksgiving to the Giver of the harvest, which custom Mr. Hastings had restored on first coming to the parish, and the approaching festivity reminded Eleanor of certain requisite little purchases to be made in Ashwell, as the small village town of Norrington did not produce more than the ordinary supply of prints, tapes, and cottons, besides the stereotyped editions of tea, tobacco, and snuff; accordingly at luncheon (as early dinners are now by courtesy called), she proposed a walk thither, to which Maude readily acceded.

"Indeed," she added, "I was going to ask you the same question, as I have set my heart on finishing off that frock for Elizabeth



Weaver, and I have not quite enough of the material, though I know I can match it at Gilmores."

"And I," said Eleanor "have promised Mr. Hastings to design something for the centre of the top wall of the barn, and I have a splendid idea, Maude, will you help me to carry it out? I must have some red glazed calico for the ground, and, if you do not mind, we must come back by Owen's Cottage as he is very handy, and will easily knock up a frame for me."

"What can it be to require a carpenter and red calico?" enquired Tom.


"O, never mind, Tom, you will see it when it is done, and no one but Maude and myself must know anything of my grand ideas until we see the effect of them."

"I think I can give a shrewd guess at your intentions," said Maude, "and at all events I shall be delighted to help you, and am already longing to begin—I must not forget

either the wheat wreaths I promised to weave, or to tie up the bunches for the men to wear in the button holes of their coats ; however, we still have a clear week before us."

Mr. and Mrs. Ferne talked of the unnecessary expenditure of these yearly feasts, and suggested many other ways in which the same money might be laid out to a much greater advantage, suggesting that their old friend, Mr. Hitchins, the former Rector of the parish, had never thought such a display of thankfulness necessary, but the good old times were, alas ! gone, never to return.

Eleanor and Maude lost no time when the cloth was removed, in equipping themselves in their walking attire, and were ready to start when Mr. Ferne came out from the dining-room, hoping they had remembered that the dews fall very early at this season, so that if they intended to return across the fields by Owen's Cottage they had better wear goloshes, as he had himself caught cold the



previous evening in merely walking as far as the stable after sunset.

The girls allayed his anxiety by promising to be home early, and assured him they were well shod for the field walk.

Eleanor's animated expression of countenance under that sweet little straw hat, with its long drooping feather, was indeed a prettier picture than one meets with every day, and the graceful folds of her shawl showed off her fine figure to its full advantage even in the lanes of Norrington.

Maude, too, in her more simple, but lady-like costume, was not wholly eclipsed by her cousin's superior beauty, as a remarkable sweetness of expression compensated for the want of the extreme brilliancy of her companion.

When the garden gate had closed, Maude began :—

“ Now, Eleanor, do tell me what are your plans for this grand design ? ”

"Oh, yes! dear Maude; and as your taste in these things is so much better than mine, you will suggest some improvement, I hope!"

"Well, let me hear what your ideas on the subject are. Did Mr. Hastings suggest anything, or did he leave it entirely to you?" enquired Maude.

"He said he thought that we two together could design and carry into execution, something far more suitable and tasty than it was last year."

"Oh, I remember that wretched attempt at a painting of Ceres, dressed in bright scarlet, with a sky-blue sickle in her hand, and with a gamboge wheatsheaf as her throne."

"What a daub it was! But doubtless poor Tom Browne thought it a first-rate picture; but I do not think we need descend to the mythological world, Eleanor: but what is your plan?"

"Well, I was thinking of a huge wheat-

sheaf in the centre, and the frame I am going to order, is to surround it in the form of an immense star, which is to be prettily edged with wheat, and the red calico would shew out brightly between. One must do it on quite a large scale. Will that do?" said Eleanor.

"Well, that would look very grand; but I'm half afraid Tom Browne might think you had borrowed his own pet idea to put in another form, as his smattering knowledge may have extended to astronomy, and he would be sure to confound his favourite goddess with the planet of that name, and he would rightly argue that as the star did not twinkle, it must be meant for a planet."

"Maude, how absurd you are; but you must now suggest your own ideas for this grand centre piece, and if you reject both astronomy and mythology, we must dismount from our Pegasus."

"By no means," quickly rejoined Maude.

“As my ideas rise higher than either; what do you think of a text done in wheaten letters and wreathed round the edge? The colour of the wheat would shew out nicely on the red calico, and the frame might be of any shape you like.”

“That is a very good thought of yours, Maude, and one which is sure to please our rector. Are you sure this consideration did not affect your proposal?”

“How can you, Eleanor, attribute such a motive, even in joke? To prove my innocence in this respect, I must confess the proposition is not quite so original as you suppose; as I saw an account of a harvest home, in the *Monthly Packet* some time ago, where something of the kind had been adopted.”

“Pardon, and peace!” exclaimed Eleanor, “only the attack was quite irresistible, and the more so, as it seems such a very tender point with my good little cousin.”

“I knew you were only saying it to try me,

Eleanor, but let us settle this knotty point, for we are almost at our journey's end."

"Well, the next thing to be fixed on, is the text, that we may judge of the size required, it should not be a very long one, I think," said Eleanor.

"No, that is the difficulty, to get an appropriate one, of the required length; but what do you think of this one:—"The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof!" Would that do?"

"It would be just the thing in every way," was Eleanor's reply; "and the next thing is, what size must the frame be, that I may know how much red calico to get."

The various minor details having been discussed, and the shopping being at length satisfactorily accomplished, the two girls soon found themselves at Owen's Cottage, where the important frame-work, which was to be a large circle made of thin laths of wood, was promised to be sent home the next day.

They had not proceeded far on their homeward walk across the fields, and were still discussing their plans of action in the decorative line, when in the distance they espied two sportsmen with their retrievers, advancing towards them, which set Eleanor's wits to work to speculate on whom the strangers could possibly be.

Maude concluded they were friends of Mr. Bolton's coming down for some shooting, and staying at the Park; but at this moment the sound of two horses behind them caused them to turn their heads, when they perceived Mr. Bolton and Arabella overtaking them on horseback. The girls stopped until they came up, and by this time the sportsmen had joined the party, when the usual introductions took place, as, though the strangers, who proved to be Lord Thornbury and Sir Andrew Bolton were not guests at Bolton Park, an acquaintance had been made since they had taken up their quarters in the Dolphin Hotel at Ashwell.



Eleanor's beauty and grace could not fail at once to attract the attention of such a *connoisseur* as Lord Thornbury, and his earnest gaze did not pass unheeded by Arabella Bolton, and was sufficiently *prononcé* to add to the former brilliancy of Eleanor's cheeks.

After a few minutes' conversation, the equestrians proceeded on their way, and the gallant sportsmen who were retiring thus early from their occupation, merely because the game was too wild for good sport, courteously requested leave to escort the errant damsels to their own door, if such rough apparel did not startle such delicate nerves.

Eleanor laughed merrily at such an idea, and soon fell into a bantering conversation with Lord Thornbury, whom we must, however, introduce properly to our readers, as well as his companion.

Lord Thornbury had in reality passed the meridian of life, being within very few steps of fifty; but age had dealt very gently with him, and he had apparently been as exempt from

cares hitherto as any mortal man could hope to be. His hair, too, being of a light brown colour, betrayed no tale-telling streaks of grey. And a proud blue eye glittered beneath undimmed by hard study. He was about the average height, and with enough soupçon of corpulence to destroy the complete ease and grace which might in former years have rendered his upright carriage a point of admiration to the gazer. He had retired from the army on his father's death, a few years since, and passed his time chiefly in pleasure seeking, sometimes in London, and occasionally at the family seat in Berkshire, Woodside Manor, whence he and his friend had lately arrived, as Sir Andrew Bolton had property near Ashwell, which he visited every year at this season. Sir Andrew Bolton was a distant connection of the family, now resident at Bolton Park, and the next heir to the property, there being no son, and one of Mrs. Bolton's fondest dreams for her daughter was

to secure her a life-long interest in Bolton Park by a marriage with Sir Andrew.

It mattered not to her that the young baronet was in the eyes of all the rest of the world nothing more than a good-natured fool. His appearance was in his favour. Hair, black as night, over a pale, high forehead, though too narrow for intellect; and large, dark blue eyes, with a handsome aquiline nose, and a faultless mouth; but even with these advantages of feature, all nobility of countenance was wanting. In a word, the idea of weakness reigned visibly impressed in every corner. There was a quick, but undecided manner of expressing himself, and at times a very vacant stare, when the fine, blue eyes appeared fixed on vacancy. His conversation, when he roused himself so far as to talk at all, beyond the mere answering questions addressed to him, was confined to the merits of horses and dogs. And anyone sufficiently venturesome to broach the sub-

ject of the fine arts, invariably found him reverting to some favourite picture of the winner of the Derby or St. Leger. This bright specimen of humanity fell to Maude's share, for the path was too narrow to admit of more than two people walking together.

"A pretty country this, Miss Leigh," observed Lord Thornbury, "but may I ask how you contrive to keep yourselves alive in this remote corner of the earth?"

"Oh! I assure you we are not in any danger of dying of inanition at present, my Lord. Have you not heard of the gaiety in store for us next week?"

"No! indeed, but I shall be too glad if the gaiety will include me amongst its victims, if as I presume, it is to be graced by such fair scions as I find even this secluded neighbourhood can produce. Are you and Miss Ferne likely to be present?" quickly added Lord Thornbury.

"Oh, yes, but you have not enquired what

particular form our village gaiety is to bloom, and perhaps the style may not suit one accustomed to London life, as I conclude you must be, so prepare your mind for something very rural, my Lord, and I will watch your countenance, to see how you survive the shock."

"I think you will find me capable of accommodating myself even to sylvan pursuits, Miss Leigh, if you will promise to aid me with your advice and patronage, though I own pic-nics and archery parties have no special attractions in themselves for me, and I conclude you wish me to bring down my imagination to that standard—am I right?"

"I fear you will have to descend still further in the scale, my Lord; but not to keep you longer in suspense, the fête I alluded to was our annual Harvest Home, where all meet, rich and poor, and I assure you we poor benighted peasants contrive to pass the evening as gaily and merrily, or more so

than one often does in London. Confess now, my Lord, that you are fairly shocked."

"By no means, only when is the brilliant assembly to take place, and what is the order of the day?"

Eleanor only had time to give a sketch of the usual proceedings on such occasions, when they found themselves at Oak Cottage, and Maude and Sir Andrew Bolton coming up with them, adieux were exchanged, but not until Lord Thornbury had expressed a hope that he might some morning be indulged with a few songs, as the fame of Miss Leigh's musical talent had reached him through Mr. Hastings, whom he had met the previous evening at dinner at Bolton Park. The promise was readily given, and I fear Eleanor looked forward to its fulfilment with almost as much *empressement* as his Lordship.

Maude was too much relieved by the departure of her dull companion to make much comment on the parting promise Eleanor had

given, and perhaps was too much accustomed to the free and easy manner of her cousin toward her new acquaintance to be rendered uneasy by it.

Tea time passed away with its usual topics of discourse, interlarded with many a caution to poor Tom in one way and another, and an account from the girls of the different people they had seen in their walk, winding up with their newly-made acquaintance, when Eleanor observed to Maude,

“I hope you found your hero as amusing as mine was—Sir Andrew Bolton is very handsome and aristocratic looking too?”

“That is possible,” replied Maude “but his conversational powers seem remarkably limited, and after he had exhausted the usual atmospheric dialogue, and I had helped him to an idea, about the unusual abundance of game this year, we came to a full stop, though I must say he found his tongue again to enquire if we were sisters, Eleanor, and he

wondered greatly at his own sagacity in discovering that we were not the least alike, as he repeated that same idea in two or three different ways."

"Really, Maude, you are growing quite satirical. I have some hopes of you; but tell us in what way Sir Andrew contrived to paraphrase such a simple fact, as it must have required some amount of talent, and more eloquence than I can boast of."

Maude smiled, but did not seem inclined to pursue the subject further.

The next morning both cousins set to work immediately after breakfast, on the promised decorations for the barn, and so rapidly the morning slipped away, that when the first dinner bell rang, they had not accomplished half they had intended; but Eleanor had to accompany her aunt on a round of visits directly after dinner, so she flew up stairs to make a suitable toilette, leaving Maude to set the room to rights.



Eleanor half hoped she might chance to encounter the two sportsmen, as they drove through the lanes, and once, hearing the sound of guns at no great distance, her eyes flashed, and her colour rose in expectation.

Oh, Eleanor, have you forgotten a certain distant wanderer, whose thoughts have never for one moment proved disloyal to you; that an acquaintance of yesterday should raise any emotion in your breast?

However, the apparition of two gamekeepers gave a decided check to her hopes, and they returned from the drive without any interesting meeting to relate; however, a few mornings afterwards, as the cousins were busily engaged in their now usual morning's work, amongst the wheat, in a room which had formerly been their school room, and the window of which looked out on the approach to the house, the two strangers were seen advancing, though from the improved style of habiliment, it required a second glance to re-

cognise Lord Thornbury, and Sir Andrew Bolton.

Eleanor threw down the letter she was making, and rushed to the door, with a half apology to Maude for her desertion, before it was necessary. "But I must not go down, this figure, so do not wait for me when we are sent for to the drawing-room, and I will follow as soon as I can," she added.

Accordingly, a very few minutes afterwards Eleanor descended from her rapid but tasteful toilette, and received the visitors in her usual style of perfect self-possession.

When she was seated, Lord Thornbury, who was delighted to exchange the subject of Turkish baths, on which Mr. Ferne had immediately attacked him, when he found he lived chiefly in London, for that of music, expressed a hope that Miss Leigh had not forgotten the parting promise.

"Oh, no!" said Eleanor; "I will either play or sing to you, with pleasure, only you

must not be hard upon country performers, and expect me to be *au fait* of all the favorite songs of the last season."

"You seem to think me very exigent, Miss Leigh, but be assured any selection of your own would please me best."

And they moved off to the piano, where, after some turning over of portfolios, music books, and manuscript music, Lord Thornbury begged for that sweet little song from Tennyson's *Idylls of the Kings*; "Sweet is true love," which Eleanor sung with exquisite pathos.

"Once more," whispered Lord Thornbury. "May I ask for it once more? Such music I have not heard for many a day. "Sweet is true love," he sighed to himself, "tho' given in vain, in vain!"

Several more songs followed, and when the gentlemen thought they had paid an unconvincible visit, they rose to depart, and Lord Thornbury having discovered, to his great

surprise, that Eleanor had not read his favourite volume of Tennyson, had promised to send it to her the following day, when it accordingly arrived, with several passages strongly underlined with very fresh looking marks, so that there was little doubt of its having been done for Eleanor's special edification.

St. Michael's day at length arrived; a peal of bells merrily announcing its coming festivities. A soft mist had hung low over the hills in the morning, and many fears were at first entertained lest the sun should not be powerful enough to disperse the thick veil which blotted out the wooded hills of Bolton Park, and hung in soft wreaths round the high and broken ground of Cranston Moor.

Vain fears! Maude lingered long at the window to watch the gradual emerging of each feature of the fair landscape from the dim shroud, till at last the grey tower of Norrington Church shewed clear against the sky, surmounted by its gay banner, appro-


priate for the occasion, which seemed to wave an invitation to all around that church tower to consecrate this day of thanksgiving by their presence within the sacred walls; however, this I fear was not so fully responded to as one could have wished.

At two o'clock a procession of school children, with Miss Hastings and Maude at their head, was seen winding its way through the village street under a perfect cloud of flags of all the colours of the rainbow; the top of each flag-staff bearing its bunch of golden wheat, and they presently reached the narrow church path. At the porch, each standard-bearer yielded up his or her trophy of honour, and after some arrangement on the parts of the schoolmaster and mistress, entered the church, chanting a psalm, the sound of their young voices filling Miss Hastings' eyes with tears. The congregation gradually dropped in, and after a joyous choral service, Mr. Hastings concluded the service with a

sermon of ten minutes, suitable for the occasion, and the children were again marshalled off in due order to the Rectory field, where a very large tent, which was pitched every year for the occasion, stood in all the splendour of its decorations, the vacant spaces being now filled in with the school banners. Long, narrow tables were arranged to the best advantage for space, and covered with white calico, the amount of which would have appeared a startling piece of extravagance to Mrs. Ferne, had not Maude assured her it was always cut up afterwards into garments for the poor. On the table stood gigantic joints of meat, and a large supply of enormous plum-puddings, and each guest brought his own knife and fork, plate and cup. Numbers might be now seen pouring in at the gates of the Rectory field, and each person deposited a provision of crockery, &c., in the tent before the hour of dinner arrived, and by four o'clock the whole village had assembled and were

grouped in different masses in the field, Mr. and Miss Hastings strolling about amongst them, with a friendly greeting for all. And now all are fairly seated at the festive board, and the neighbouring gentry come flocking in, amongst whom we perceive the party from Bolton Park, which includes Lord Thornbury and Sir Andrew Bolton, Mr. and Mrs. Ferne, Maude and Eleanor, with Tom, who looked ready for any amount of mischief with those merry, sparkling eyes. Mr. Selby, too, had not been able to resist the temptation of a "purely accidental" visit on the occasion, knowing that the freedom of those kind of days was especially favourable for increasing intimacy, as banishing the restraint of intercourse so often felt between four straight walls.

"Oh! Eleanor, do you not wish Charles were here to-day, instead of poring over his desk in that roasting climate of Barbadoes?" was Maude's remark.




"Well—yes it would be very nice, but I doubt if he would enter into an entertainment of this kind with much gusto," replied Eleanor.

"Oh! but with you at his side, dear Eleanor, every scene would have its additional charm, and he could not resist the mirth and joyousness of the feast, though of a different class and order to those in which he shines with so much brilliancy."

Eleanor's face flushed as she interpreted her cousin's remarks into a gentle hint to remind her that she was an engaged demoiselle.

At this moment Lord Thornbury joined the cousins, and after some remarks on the scene before them, he suggested to Eleanor that the tent was very warm, and proposed a turn in the field outside.

"That would indeed be a pleasant change," she replied, "as I always prefer the lovely blue sky as a canopy to coarse canvass, however highly decorated."





“ Ah ! so do I ! ” sighed his Lordship “ but I want especially to hear how you like my favourite Elaine.”

“ I am sorry you could for a moment doubt my full appreciation of its beauties, Lord Thornbury, but if you ask me which of the four Idylls I prefer, I should at once give the palm to Guinevere, however, at present my view is very superficial, as one reading of this style of poetry does not convey its full meaning and worth.”

“ You are quite right, Miss Leigh, in feeling that Tennyson requires thorough mastery before its beauties are wholly revealed, but,” he added smiling, “ I can scarcely picture you immured in a convent like the poor Queen, though I can see you in bright array gracing the highest circles in the land.”

Eleanor blushed, and her companion looked pensively on her down cast eyes, until she suddenly rallied by confessing to him that she feared society would have too great attractions for her, which led to a long and

animated discussion of the merits and demerits of London society. By this time many of the spectators had followed the example of strolling in the field, and our poetic pair shortly after fell in with Maude and Mr. Selby, who were apparently in deep converse, as both started on the approach of Lord Thornbury and Eleanor, which fact seemed quite the illustration of an idea which Maude had been trying to impress on Mr. Selby's mind as to the perfect hopelessness of the attachment which he had half confessed for her cousin, though she had been careful to guard the secret of her engagement to Charles Stafford.

The Harvest Home lost all its charms from that moment for Mr. Selby, who suddenly remembered an engagement which would oblige him to say his adieux at once, and the departing wheels of his dog-cart were soon heard beneath the hedge where the road lay.

The afternoon passed by as such afternoons usually do, in games of all sorts for the

younger people, and the gradual subsiding of the elderlies into their own homes as twilight came on.

Mr. and Miss Hastings had been too much occupied in attending to the villagers to see much of the élite, who fell into parties and groups as spectators, and neither Maude nor Eleanor were sorry when Mr. and Mrs. Ferne insisted on their accompanying them home, which was soon followed by a general ordering of carriages and departures.

Let us in imagination follow Eleanor to her pillow as she reviews the events of the day, and ask if her conscience is clear from every cloud of self-accusation, and leaving her deep in reveries in which Charles Stafford and Lord Thornbury are strangely amalgamated, we will bid our readers good night.

## CHAPTER VII.

Since the face is comely—some of you,  
Here, take him up and bear him to our hall;  
And if he live, we will have him of our band.

“I must go and see Mrs. Brooks this afternoon,” said Eleanor, the day after the events narrated in the last chapter. “I feel rather dull after my fatigues.”

Eleanor had set her mind upon having a good talk with her old nurse alone; and she was half afraid that her cousin might offer to accompany her. However, Mrs. Brooks was not a favourite of Maude's, and knowing that Eleanor did not mind walking alone through the fields which led to Huntly Farm, she preferred going on with her own occupations.

The day was calm and still, deep purple shadows lay among the trees, which were beginning to lose something of their rich verdure in the more brilliant hues of autumn. Eleanor's mind, however, was full of other thoughts, the play of light and shade was unheeded; she stopped now and then indeed, but it was to call her little dog, which darted here and there after falling leaves. She did not look happy—her thoughts,—she felt conscious, were wandering too idly! she was thinking over the incidents of the preceding day. How happy Maude had looked—how kind Mr. and Miss Hastings were—how good to everybody. Miss Hastings, too, looked happy; she seemed perfectly contented. Yet, she must know that she was almost an old maid! Something in this fashion ran Eleanor's musings.

“How well I remember this day last year! Am I happier now than I was then? I remember thinking then that it must be a de-

lightful thing to be engaged,—to be the chosen of one whose disposition accorded with my own—one whom I could admire and love. Ah! well, it is pleasant to think of Charles! Poor fellow! I know he loves me; I wonder whether there is much chance of his doing well in Barbadoes! Come here, May, my pet,” and she took the little dog in her arms and carried her safely past her great enemy, the turkey-cock, who strutted towards her as she approached the farm.

Eleanor opened the little gate which led to the front door of Huntly Farm, through rows of magnificent double stocks and tall fuschias, on which Mrs. Brooks prided herself not a little.

The house door was open, and Eleanor could not avoid hearing part of the conversation between that good lady and her husband.

“A cold have you, John? Why did you go and set yourself, just in the thick of the draughts yesterday, just for nothing, but be-

cause Mr. Hastings asked you to carve for the old men; sich nonsense making such ceremonies with their Harvest Home, why, wasn't we good enough before, I should like to know? but they Hastings is such conshequential folk! In old Mr. Hitchins' time we never had nothing of the kind, and he was real gentlefolks, if ever there was one."

Then catching sight of Eleanor, she moderated her tone.

"I was just telling John he must take care of his cold, else I shall have him coughing and wheezing like our old horse."

"I am sorry your cold is so bad, John," said Eleanor; "let me be your doctor! You should put your feet in hot water, and go to bed early."

"Put his feet in hot water!" ejaculated his wife. "No, that he shan't. I don't hold with messing. I'm determined—why the water 'll get into his blood, and make him weak. Go, John, and sit in the great chair

in the corner by the fire, and I'll come and make you a drop of tea when I've had a bit of talk with Miss Eleanor."

"Please to come in, Miss, and sit down a bit—the sun's nice and pleasant in here." She led the way into her little parlour, a pleasant low roofed room with great beams running across the ceiling and deep window seats in which stood two or three geraniums; the rays of the setting sun shone slantingly into the room, and the air seemed full of golden dust—a mingled smell of stocks and mignonette, with a suspicion of apples, somewhat pervaded the room, and Eleanor asked if she might open the window, as she was rather warm with walking. "And how's Mr. and Mrs. Ferne and Miss Maude," asked Mrs. Brooks, "I need not ask how you are, Miss Eleanor, for I never did see you looking better nor brighter."

"I am quite well, thank you, Sarah."

"And happy, my darling?"



"Yes! I suppose I am very happy too," said Eleanor—"but I came to tell you about our gay doings yesterday, if you have not already heard all from John?"

"Oh he can't tell such things; I was sure you would come some when, so I didn't ask him. I do like to hear it all from you like a story. Tell me first, was Lord Thornbury there?"

"Yes, he was, and Sir Andrew Bolton; they came with the party from Bolton Park—but why were you not there too, Sarah?"

"Oh it's too much ceremony for me, and there was the milk to see to, and lots of things, and I wasn't going to trust the girl to do them, the girls is so *fullish* now-a-days. But do tell me, what did you think of Lord Thornbury?"

"He is certainly a very fine looking man; too stout, but anyone could see he was some one above the common."

"That's what I said; I saw him the other

day talking to John, and when they was gone they was both together, he and Sir Andrew, and I said—‘John,’ said I, ‘that’s the man as our Miss Eleanor ought to have had—he’s so tall and so upright like,’ and he did talk so grand and so slow—John said, ‘why, Mr. Stafford’s a deal pleasanter and more cheerful like,’ but I said, ‘John, don’t you be fullish, a Lord’s a Lord, and Mr. Stafford will never be like Lord Thornbury, and you mark my words, that’s the man that Miss Eleanor did ought to marry.’ Was he sort of civil to you, Miss, at the feast yesterday? Did he seem attentive like?”

“Why, yes, Sarah,” laughed Eleanor “I cannot say he was at all behindhand in civility and attention, and all that sort of thing.”

“Now, Miss Eleanor, I have heard something—I have heard that Lord Thornbury was going home this week—he was going last week, but I heard, and they as told me was quite surprised like, that his Lordship

should trouble about such things. I heard that he stayed a purpose to go to the Harvest Home, and then he said he should go on Wednesday, and then this morning John was over at Ashwell, and my Lord's servant comes out of the Dolphin a cussing and swearing, and he says 'I can't think what's come to the old cove'—them's the very words he said, 'he don't know his own mind two hours together, here have I been slaving like a nigger to get ready to start at ten o'clock, and now the orders is just given as we are to stay on at this hole of a place—really John,' says he 'the old governor sits like physick upon me,' and John says 'what's up, and the other says 'spite that's what 'tis.'—Now, Miss Eleanor, I believe that he stays on just a purpose to see you, and I do hope you'll be kind to him, poor gentleman, and only just think, Miss Eleanor if he did like you, and who that ever sees your sweet face can help liking you, aye, and loving you too, what a fine match it would be."

Eleanor was carelessly playing with a little twig which she had taken from her dog, she sat in a tall straight chair of black oak, her hat was thrown off, and the rich masses of dark hair shadowed her lovely face; truly as she sat there, half in sunlight half in the shadow of the deep window, Mrs. Brooks might be excused for thinking that Lord Thornbury had only to see her at that moment to decide upon throwing himself and his coronet at her feet.

Eleanor sighed. "Hush, Sarah," she said. "You must not talk in this way, and I ought not to listen to you. You must remember that I am engaged. Mr. Stafford loves me, and I love him. Lord Thornbury is nothing to me, it signifies nothing whether he stays on at Ashwell or goes back to Woodside Manor. I shall most likely never see him again. He has been very pleasant and agreeable the few times I have met him, and that is all. You may just as well talk to me about Sir Andrew Bolton as Lord Thornbury."

"Oh, no," interrupted Mrs. Brooks. "The other one is silly, my Miss Eleanor would never think of him, not if he were the King. Ah, my dear, don't think too much of Mr. Stafford, he'll may be forget you out there, or he'll catch the fever and die; there's many a fine, strong young man goes out to India and he's no sooner there than he's took with cholera, or something, and dies off all at once."

"Do be quiet, Sarah, with your dismal histories. You will make me quite melancholy, and besides, it is not India Mr. Stafford is gone to, but Barbadoes."

"Now, don't take anyone up so quick, Miss Eleanor. I know 'tis all the same. Africa or India, 'tis all one."

Eleanor rose to go, and tied on her hat. Mrs. Brooks came forward to help her, and passed her hand fondly over her shining hair.

"Ah, Miss Eleanor," she said, "you take my advice, when Lord Thornbury speaks to you, you look at him straight; now don't

you let him see your side-face, for it's so covered up with all this hair, that it don't half show."

"Very well. Good bye," said Eleanor, laughing; "take care of John's cold, I am sure he must be impatient for his tea. Come, May."

Through the little garden, down a narrow lane, and then across a broad meadow, and then over a stile, which led into the road. Eleanor had only to cross this road, when a couple more fields would lead her nearly to the entrance of Oak Cottage. She had gained the stile, on which she stood leaning for a few minutes, listening to the rushing of the stream which ran under a bridge, about a hundred yards down the road. It was a dangerous place—this—a sudden turn at the bottom of a steep hill, led over the bridge, the stream there was pent in by high banks, which were in many places undermined by its course, and every now and then a slip of the earth brought

fences, and even the edge of the road, down together.

It was a road, however, that had not been much used lately, for though the scenery through which it led was very lovely, it joined another and a more practicable one a little distance off, and nervous people, and those who regarded the welfare of their horses, preferred going a little farther round. Eleanor sprang over the stile, and went a few steps out of her way, that she might watch the water circling and foaming round a mass of earth covered with tangled foliage, which had fallen into the stream since she last passed that way. She raised her head suddenly,

"Surely it cannot be," she said, "a carriage coming down Welford Hill! Ah! did they not see the bar! they cannot know of this fresh fall of the road."

On came the carriage down that fearful hill, swaying from side to side—the horses in

full gallop; it was evident the driver had lost all control over the terrified animals.

Eleanor stood for one moment as if spell-bound! she knew what must happen; no fence to the steep bank! no power to check their headlong career in time to turn them over the bridge. One chance—one only, with the quickness of lightning it flashed across her.

Just at the bottom of the hill, a few yards before the point where the bank had fallen down, was a gate leading into a freshly-ploughed field, would it be possible to turn the horses in there! it was the only chance; Eleanor darted forwards, threw open the heavy gate, and waited breathlessly to see the end. She might be of use. She was no coward. She could at all events summon assistance. She could not turn away her eyes. It seemed that until they reached nearly the bottom of the hill the occupants of the carriage had not understood the full extent of their danger, for a shrill scream of terror rang



in Eleanor's ears, and at the same moment one of the gentlemen it contained, leapt out, and after staggering a moment fell heavily on the ground.

Eleanor thought not of the danger to herself in case her scheme failed ; she stood close to the gate. " Turn in here," she cried, and her clear voice amazed even herself by its steadiness ; it seemed also as if the sound of it recalled self-possession to the driver,—one effort more, a powerful hand on the reins, never more needed, succeeded at the last moment in checking the horses so far as to guide their mad course into the ploughed field, just clear of the gate ; the sudden turn, the check, threw the carriage over, and the horses, after struggling for a minute remained quiet enough for Eleanor, who rushed forward as the carriage passed her, to approach, without fear of being in their way :

" Lord Thornbury," exclaimed Eleanor, " are you hurt ?"

" Oh ! his lordship is killed !" cried the

groom, who had been thrown to some little distance, and was now approaching, rubbing his shoulder.

"Not so," said Eleanor. "See, he opens his eyes, he is faint; hold his head up a little, I will be back in a moment."

She flew down the steep bank to the water. How she scrambled down she could never remember afterwards. She soaked her handkerchief in the stream, and in a few minutes was again on the scene of the disaster, bathing Lord Thornbury's forehead. In a few minutes he revived, and the expression of his eye, as it caught hers, made the quick blush crimson cheek and forehead.

"My preserver," he said, "you have saved my life. Miss Leigh, would it have grieved you if your warning had come too late? but where is Bolton? What has become of him?" "Ah!" he added, passing his hand across his brow, "he jumped out; I could not hold him, and the horses, too; let us go to him! I can stand now."

"No, my lord," said Eleanor, "you are not fit to move just now! send the groom. I trust he is not hurt; he leapt out nearly at the bottom of the hill."

She made Lord Thornbury lean upon her arm, and led him slowly towards the gate.

The groom having obtained the assistance of some labourers in a field near to take charge of his horses, thought it might be time to see after Sir Andrew Bolton, and ran off, accompanied by two of the men. The baronet was still lying where he had fallen, and from the pain he suffered in attempting to move, it was evident that a broken bone, or at the least a very serious sprain was the result of the accident. Some time elapsed before a light cart could be obtained from Ashwell Farm, furnished by Mrs. Brooks, with plenty of hay and pillows.

Lord Thornbury was by this time pretty well recovered from the shock of his fall, and felt little inconvenience beyond some bruises and a considerable degree of stiffness. It

must be owned he continued to make use of the slight support afforded by Eleanor's arm long after it was really needed. When however, the cart was ready, and Sir Andrew Bolton lifted carefully into it, and the injured leg placed as comfortably as possible, Eleanor assisting in directing the arrangement, he was obliged to relinquish it.

"How shall I thank you, Miss Leigh," he said, "I own I have trespassed too long upon your kindness, but I can scarcely regret the accident as far as I alone am concerned; it has shewn me that the loveliest and gentlest of beings is possessed of courage and presence of mind, which is often deficient in our rougher sex," he glanced at Sir Andrew as he spoke—"I must soon leave this neighbourhood, much as I would wish to remain longer in a place which possesses such attraction for me, I must tear myself away, indispensable business obliges me to leave Ashwell—to leave you," he added in an under tone. "May I hope that when we meet again you will be disposed

to regard me as more than a mere acquaintance."

"Oh, my Lord," said Eleanor "I shall ever remember these few days with pleasure."

"But, Miss Leigh," he said suddenly "you are trembling; fool that I was to forget that the fright, and your brave exertions in our behalf must have been too much for you. How selfish I have been! can you forgive me? Allow me to accompany you to the farmhouse I see through the trees—lean on me."

"Not there," said Eleanor, "I am well, my Lord, it is nothing; in a few minutes I shall feel quite strong again, it is only this foolish trembling, but I am very near home, nearer than you think," she added, as she met Lord Thornbury's eye fixed upon her with an expression of deep anxiety, far greater she felt than the occasion required. "Goodbye, my Lord," she held out her hand to him.

"No, Miss Leigh, I must return to Oak Cottage with you, I cannot leave you thus."

A petulant exclamation of pain at this

moment recalled his attention to Sir Andrew, the first movement of the cart had thrown him into a paroxysm of pain, and Lord Thornbury was obliged to own that Eleanor was right, as she represented to him the necessity of accompanying his friend back to Ashwell. "Farewell then, Miss Leigh, it must not be long before we meet again—give me one kind word at parting, say that you will not quite forget me—that you, too, hope we may meet again."

A warm pressure of the hand accompanied the words, so warm that, though she was angry at herself for blushing, she could not control the deep colour that mounted her brow; she tried to laugh off her embarrassment. "Well then, my Lord, I hope if we do meet again it will be under happier auspices; but you will soon forget such insignificant people as we are, and Norrington will only be associated in your mind with a very disagreeable upset."

"Not so—not so, *au revoir*."

He was gone; Eleanor remained, as if

spell bound, on the spot where he had left her ; she watched the cart as it went slowly back up the steep hill, until a turn in the road hid it from her sight, then she turned and walked slowly home. She looked pale and worn by the time she re-entered Oak Cottage, and Maude's affectionate eye immediately saw that something was the matter.

"Eleanor dear, you are ill? what has happened? you looked so well when you went out."

All necessity for exertion being now over, Eleanor's spirit gave way and she burst into tears, which greatly alarmed Maude and her uncle; by the aid of *sal volatile*, however, she soon recovered sufficiently to give an account of the accident.

"Poor man! poor man!" exclaimed Mr. Ferne, "how unfortunate it did not happen when he was at home, there is no medical man here worth anything; as to Thompson, I would not trust my dog in his care."

The following morning Mr. Ferne sent

over a messenger loaded with two or three medical books, for the benefit of poor Sir Andrew, and to enquire how he had passed the night; the messenger, however, brought the books back again, as he said Sir Andrew Bolton was not at the Dolphin.

Mr. and Mrs. Bolton had been with the baronet the evening before, and finding that a very severe sprain and other injuries would render him entirely helpless for some weeks, had insisted on removing him to Bolton Park; and they had accordingly sent the carriage for him soon after breakfast.

"What a glorious plan," said Eleanor.  
"Mrs. Bolton and Arabella have their eyes open!"



## CHAPTER VIII.

"If music be the food of love, play on."

TWELFTH NIGHT.

THE usually quiet village of Norrington had subsided into its ordinary state of quiescence, and the bright hues of autumn had faded into the too sombre tint of early winter, excepting here and there a tree which appeared to have forgotten to shed its leaves, in defiance of hoar frost, and of the fashion set by its companions.

"Does autumn make you feel sad, Eleanor?" one day enquired Maude, as she and her cousin returned from their customary walk through the beautiful beech grove, the reddish

carpet of fallen leaves crackling merrily under their light tread as they passed.

"You seem to have become more silent of late; I hope those wondrously long letters which come so regularly from the West Indies do not contain aught to disturb your reflections?"

"Oh, no," lightly replied Eleanor; "Charles's letters are always full of warmth and affection, and I ought to be very happy, but one cannot always keep one's spirits up to concert pitch, you know; and I confess it does sometimes seem a wearisome prospect to wait on without the hope even of meeting; and after all, what is it to end in?" she added, with something like a sigh. "But autumn makes me sad! what an idea! What time are we due at the Rectory this evening, Maude?"

"I promised Margaret that we would be there punctually at six o'clock, and moreover, undertook that you should go armed with

Scotch songs, to please old Mr. Cameron, who will perfectly worship you if you will condescend to indulge him with 'Bonnie Prince Charlie;' he is a very nice old man, and it will be amusing to watch his raptures, especially in those Jacobite songs which will be more to his taste than to yours, I fancy, Eleanor."

"I am glad you have given me the hint Maude, as otherwise I might have been wasting some of my operatic gems on him, which would have been a pity; and you know neither the good Rector nor his sister are sufficiently musical to appreciate the difference."

"Well," replied Maude, "I cannot quite agree with you as to their not being sufficiently musical, as I remember one evening a long time ago, your singing some of Handel's music to Mr. Hastings, when he looked quite enraptured, and he told me afterwards it had been one of the greatest treats he could

have had, but one which he could very seldom get."

Eleanor laughed merrily, adding, "then I will make a sandwich of Handel and the Charlie songs to night, to suit the taste of each connoisseur—which will be the bread, and which the meat, Maude?" a satirical light playing in her eyes as she spoke.

After some discussion as to the merits of each style, the cousins reached home only in time to make a rapid toilette, and after some injunctions from Mr. Ferne, to walk briskly each way, in order to avoid as much as possible the fatal effects of Autumn mists, and the malaria produced by the dead leaves—for poor Mr. Ferne seemed to vow a special vengeance against the beauties of Autumn in the terrors of his imagination, and after a few cautions to Maude from her mother that one of the handles of Mr. Hasting's doors was apt to catch the sleeves of any careless passer by, and make a serious rent in any thin material,

the two girls started, and ten minutes' walk brought them to the Rectory porch.

Norrington Rectory was an old fashioned house, made up of a combination of every style of domestic architecture between the ark and those Cockney Villas which are rife in the suburbs of London, but it was comfortable withal, and sufficiently removed from the village street, by a spacious lawn in front, for privacy, and yet within three minutes' walk of the heart of the parish, there being a drive up from the gate, by the side of the churchyard, from which it was only screened by a row of high trees, with a shrubbery of underwood beneath on one side, and a prettily arranged flower garden on the other. A good sized greenhouse made the finale to the irregular pile of building, and it certainly produced a perpetual summer of flowers, in recompense of the care bestowed upon it by Miss Hastings, and in due season, noble clusters of grapes hung in profusion from its roof,

as many a poor feverish invalid could testify with gratitude for refreshment which was as readily offered to the poorest as well as to their richer neighbours.

On entering the drawing-room, they found the urn already hissing out its exuberant welcome, and the bright fire blazing in the well polished grate, gave a most cheerful appearance to that elegant little apartment. They were received, as usual, with warm friendliness by Mr. and Miss Hastings, and with some degree of old fashioned stiffness by Mr. Cameron, whose manner, however, soon thawed under the influence of Eleanor's gay laugh, and Maude's sweet smile, aided perhaps (though be it spoken *sotto voce*) by the fragrant fumes of the coffee, of which beverage he was especially fond.

As soon as the tea things were cleared away, Mr. Hastings brought forward a gigantic portfolio, and placing it on the table, disclosed to view a large number of German prints,

which he had lately picked up in London, and which he was particularly anxious for Maude to see, and leaving these two to exchange their ideas of art in general, and these prints in particular, (and Mr. Hastings certainly had the power of extracting Maude's views and ideas on most subjects, in a wonderful way), we must conduct Eleanor to the piano, where she undoubtedly reigned supreme on all occasions.

Mr. Cameron assured her of his perfect content with any choice of her own, in answer to her enquiry as to what kind of song he would like best, "but if I may express a preference, Miss Leigh, it would be in favour of some simple English ballad, rather than the present style of young-lady performance in Italian or Spanish, or worst of all, German."

Eleanor promised not to offend in this line, and sang "Annie Laurie," which was warmly applauded by Mr. Cameron, when Miss Hastings, who was busily working near

the fire, asked for the very song of which Maude had forewarned her, and great was the old gentleman's delight, when Eleanor good-naturedly sang it through a second time. Song followed song as Maude and Mr. Hastings were in quiet converse over the prints, and one less *au fait* with the long-subsisting friendship between them, might have fancied that the rector's warm interest in the tastes and likings of his fair parishioner, might prove dangerous to both of them, but a most unconscious sisterly manner on her part would check any great amount of speculation. And so the evening glided by as many evenings had done before at the Rectory, though before closing the piano, Eleanor, who had not been unobservant of those around her, even during her performances, was determined to indulge Mr. Hastings with one of his favourite Handelian strains, and "Angels ever bright and fair," attracted his attention, and again sent him into one of those ecstasies



of which Maude had spoken. Two or three more songs of the same kind followed, and after some refreshment in the way of cake and wine, the tinkle of the French clock on the mantle-piece warned them that ten o'clock was the orthodox hour of departure.

After Mr. Hastings had as usual seen the two girls safely home, the lovely moonlight tempted him to extend his walk by making a circuit through the fields. And what were his thoughts? It must not be disguised that they flew straight in the direction of his sweet companion of the evening ; and certain bright and intelligent grey eyes would rise unbidden to his mental vision, in spite of many attempts on his part to reason with himself, for there had been nothing in Maude's manner to warrant any assumption of attachment on her part, or even to give much hope that his earnest wishes would eventually be crowned. He escaped at length from dreamland with a fixed resolve to wait patiently in the hope

that the existing friendship would ripen into a warmer sentiment, and until that happy period he was content to let things go on in their present course without venturing upon any avowal of his feelings for her. How little the subject of these dreams was aware of them as she retired to rest that night !

Time flew on, and the Christmas festivities had long passed away, when one bright morning the postman brought Eleanor Leigh a letter, which she had long been anxiously expecting. It was from Augusta Lennox, an old school-fellow, claiming at length the fulfilment of her promise of paying her a visit in London. It had been a great object of Eleanor's ambition to visit Colonel and Mrs. Lennox ; they were wealthy people, and moved in the first circles, and Eleanor's expectations of pleasure were very great from her promised invitation into London society. The journey was soon arranged, and the friends met with all the warmth of early attachment.

“And what are the plans for this lovely day?” exclaimed Colonel Lennox the next morning, as he laid aside the *Times* for the hot rolls and fish which invited him to attend to his breakfast.

“Oh, papa!” said Augusta “do let us have a ride this afternoon; I promised Lady Venn I would bring my friend if possible to Rotten Row, as she is anxious to see the vocal star of whom she heard so much when she was staying with the Newberrys, just after Eleanor’s last visit to them, and as we are going to the Opera, that is really all we shall have time for; besides, Lady Venn is give a *matinée dansante* next week, quite an impromptu, and I am dying for an invitation.”

“Then certainly we must ride in Rotten Row, Augusta, seeing it is a matter of life and death,” observed the Colonel, with a cheerful smile.

And no sooner was the breakfast over than the two friends went into the drawing room,

and were soon in the full swing of important discussions, as to what dresses and coiffures they should appear in at the Opera. After various changes and suggestions, this knotty point was decided, and Eleanor at last summoned up courage to ask—

“At what time do gentlemen generally call here? We are sure to be out though, how tiresome! for *entre nous*—I have a sort of idea that a gentleman I met when he was shooting in our neighbourhood some time ago, may possibly leave his card here some day, for he asked so many questions as to whom I was going to stay with, and whether, if he came to call, there would be any chance of his hearing me sing his pet songs again; and I ventured to say I was sure Colonel Lennox would be pleased to make his acquaintance, and I told him what nice dinner parties you give, and that you and I were hoping to be very gay.”

“And who may this friend be,” enquired


Augusta rather eagerly. "Not an *attachè* I hope, for I have set my heart on your captivating my handsome cousin Captain Wyncroft, who is quite prepared to fall in love with my pretty Eleanor, and only waiting for an introduction to be in a state of distraction."

"Oh do not jump at such rapid conclusions! It is only Lord Thornbury, a man nearly twenty years my senior—very pleasant as an acquaintance, but not a man to fall in love with exactly; besides, there are so many looking out for him, with that beautiful park and his good position, that any such idea on my part would be very rash. I only meant that I should rather like to see him if he did come."

Here the conversation was interrupted by Mrs. Lennox coming into the room and asking the two young ladies to help her to issue a great many invitations for the long promised ball, which had been postponed until Eleanor's arrival.

At three o'clock the trio started for their ride, and in lively chat, soon found themselves amongst the brilliant assemblage of Rotten Row, which was more than usually crowded that afternoon, so that it was almost impossible to enjoy a canter, such as Eleanor in her exhilarated spirits was longing for.

They like many others, however, were attracted by the enlivening strains of the band, and made their way as well as they could through the throng surrounding this great centre of attraction, and just as they were debating as to whether it was not time to turn their horses heads in a homeward direction, a gentleman who had great difficulty in keeping his spirited horse from rearing and plunging, came up and expressed great delight at seeing the Rose of Oak Cottage amongst the fair equestrians. He had only just heard of her arrival from his friend Sir Andrew Bolton, who, he believed, had been so happy as to escort her to town the previous day.



Eleanor in return gracefully introduced her companions to Lord Thornbury, who accompanied them through the park on their way home, when he politely withdrew, but not without having ascertained their plans and engagements for the following day.

No sooner had he taken his leave, than the Colonel began to commiserate Augusta on the complete failure of her scheme as far as Lady Venn was concerned. Regrets however, were not allowed to disturb her long, for on their return to the Colonel's house in Carlton Gardens they found a note from her Ladyship lying on the marble slab, in the entrance hall, which Augusta eagerly tore open. It contained regrets that an unexpected engagement had prevented her from riding that afternoon as she had intended, but hoping that Augusta's friend would waive ceremony and accompany all their party to her *matinée dansante* on the following Tuesday, and enclosing a card for any gentleman friend they liked to bring with them.


“How charming!” exclaimed Augusta “now papa, we can take Frank Wyncroft, he will be delighted. It is just what I promised to try and manage; for London life, you must know,” she added, as she turned to Eleanor, “is made up of manœuvre and stratagem. Now promise me you will wear that lovely Paris muslin, it becomes you so well, and mamma has lent me her pearl stars for my hair, which I must wear once more before I return them to her,—but we really must make haste and dress, for Papa wishes to go early to the Opera to-night, he expects to meet Major Shakespeare, and arrange some plan with him for going to Scotland for salmon fishing.”

Eleanor rejoiced in her temporary solitude that she might retrace the interview in the park, and she could not help wishing that Lord Thornbury had been selected in lieu of Captain Wyncroft as the friend who should receive Lady Venn’s ticket, but her reveries



came to an end with her toilette, and exquisitely lovely she looked, in her pure white muslin, with no ornament except a wreath of white water-lilies crowning the luxuriant raven tresses of her hair.

Dinner over, the party soon found themselves comfortably settled in their Opera box, when, on giving a glance round the house Eleanor perceived in an opposite box, the very person of whom she had been thinking. At that moment he was offering his Opera glasses to a pretty young widow, who, with her little boy, was sitting in the front of the box. We will not say how often their eyes met, or how much more interested Eleanor felt in the fair object of Lord Thornbury's attentions, than in the prison scene of *Il Trovatore*, enraptured though the house in general was, when Mario poured forth those exquisitely plaintive strains "*Ah che la morte.*" At the close of the second act she missed the tall figure from the opposite ranks, and a half conscious



blush stole over her delicate cheek as she heard a gentle tap at the door of their own box; and a well known voice saying, "I hope you will not think me intrusive, Colonel Lennox, as I wanted to ask permission to call to-morrow in Carlton Gardens, to request Miss Leigh to allow me to copy a few verses from the book I lent her when I was in the country, for a friend who is wishing to set the words to music." This was said with a glance at Eleanor.

"Oh certainly, but do not come merely for a formal call; you will be sure to find us all at home at luncheon time, when we shall expect you," replied Colonel Lennox, and in a playful half-timid tone, Eleanor added, "and if you will tell me which portion of the poem you are in search of, I could copy it for you to-morrow morning before you arrive; I suppose it is something from your favourite Elaine?"


"A thousand thanks, Miss Leigh, selfish

being that I am, for who knows but I may then have time for one little song before luncheon, and 'Tears, idle tears,' has been haunting me night and day ever since that happy morning at Norrington, when I remember you would smile instead of weeping at the end of each verse."

"Ah! then you have changed your old favourite, Lord Thornbury, and poor 'Sweet is true love' is superseded?" archly enquired Eleanor—"Ah! it's very sad, but too true, one moment cherished, and then cast away."

"Forgive me, Miss Leigh, I never change, but variety is charming, and you see I gain an advantage by getting two sugar plums instead of one—you won't deny that?"

A half comic smile from Eleanor in reply, and a few passing remarks on the full house, and charming performances between the rest of the party, and Lord Thornbury bowed his adieux and returned to his interesting charge on the opposite side of the theatre.



Eleanor was glad to find herself alone in her room that night, where only she could indulge in reverie of any kind, and a strange mélange her thoughts presented! first pondering over Lord Thornbury's evident determination to meet her on every possible opportunity, and picturing along list of bright results accruing from his preference if his wishes were as real and serious as appearances suggested; then rambling off into some possible romance in connection with the pretty young widow, who seemed to be on very easy terms with him, when quite suddenly her thoughts were sent into a far different and perhaps less welcome channel, by the simple act of opening her dressing case. There lay a *carte de visite* which had only arrived by the last mail, and which she had locked up there for security from any enquiries which the picture of so handsome a cavalier might inconveniently produce from her friend; and in justice to our heroine, we must say a burning blush of

shame mantled over her brow, as that startling remembrance met her gaze. Poor Charles Stafford you are indeed worthy of a better fate than to be tossed to and fro as the dreams of ambition and love chase each other in such confusion in your idol's heart ! Love at first sight is too truly but a sandy foundation for a long engagement, and a coronet possesses almost magic attractions to some minds. It was some time before sleep quieted the struggling thoughts which now filled Eleanor's weary mind, but many good resolutions of constancy were mingled with still recurring thoughts of the coming meeting with Lord Thornbury on the following day.

A long letter from Maude the next morning enclosing one which had arrived from Charles Stafford, did not render her reflections less fluctuating in the interim, between breakfast and one o'clock, at which hour Lord Thornbury arrived, and her brightest smiles were

in readiness to prove the instability of her former resolutions.

Augusta's suspicions were fast rising, as the conversation became almost exclusive between Lord Thornbury and her friend, and poetry seemed its subject, when a move to the piano on Eleanor's part was as quickly followed by her admiring friend, and the two half promised songs followed, but "Sweet is true love" was in full force when the door opened, and Captain Wyncroft appeared on the scene. Augusta had not spoken too warmly of his personal appearance; his manly beauty being in its zenith, and his manners full of ease and grace.

The introductions took place, when it was discovered that he was previously acquainted with Lord Thornbury, and begging that his entrance might not disturb the sweet strains he had partially heard, the favourite song was finished, and luncheon announced, when the subject of Lady Venn's coming party hav-

ing been broached, Augusta said to her cousin :—

“ Frank, don’t you ever accuse me of forgetting your claims again, as I have a card for you, for this fairy scene at Lady Venn’s. Can you come here and make number four of our party ?”

“ With extraordinary satisfaction, cousin, fair,” replied Captain Wyncroft, with a glance in the direction of Eleanor.

And here Lord Thornbury expressed great delight in the idea of meeting all the party there, as he was an old friend of Lady Venn’s, and had also received an invitation.

“ By the way, Miss Leigh, do you not come from the neighbourhood of Bolton Park, I think Augusta told me so ?” enquired Captain Wyncroft.


“ Yes ; my home is within walking distance of Bolton Park, and I am often there,” said Eleanor, carelessly.

“ Did you ever happen to meet Charles

Stafford in those parts? He was staying down there just before he went off to Barbadoes, and a capital fellow he is."

Eleanor's self-possession failed her, as she stammered out an acknowledgment of having met him, and Lord Thornbury, who had been watching her in conversation with Captain Wyncroft, was fairly puzzled by the embarrassment so foreign to her usual manner, but quickly recovering herself, she adroitly turned the subject, by asking her unconscious tormentor if he was acquainted with Sir Andrew Bolton, who had been her escort to London, and on whose simplicity she made some amusing comments, in which Augusta joined.

Before the luncheon was ended, invitations for the coming ball had been given by Mrs. Lennox, and the Colonel in his turn proposed a day at Richmond before Augusta's young friend left them, to which both the other gentlemen warmly responded, and Eleanor





manifested great enthusiasm in the prospect of so much gaiety, as she talked over the various engagements with Mrs. Lennox and Augusta as they drove in the Park that afternoon.


In moments of solitude, many bitter reflections crowded on poor Eleanor's mind, mingled with the ideas of the fulfilment of those ambitious dreamings with which her mind had been filled before she met Charles Stafford, and do not blame her for allowing the next outward mail to depart without her usual letter to him being amongst its despatches.

## CHAPTER IX.

"Woman, thy vows are traced in sand."


THE much-talked-of Tuesday morning at length arrived, nothing of any particular importance having transpired in the intervening days, which had been passed in the usual routine of rides and drives, with a formal dinner party in Eaton Square ; and the two girls lost no time after breakfast in arranging their toilette for the anticipated scene.

It was interesting to watch Augusta's pride in her friend's beauty, and her entire freedom from any shade of jealousy or rivalry, as she tried the effect of each little decoration in enhancing the splendour of Eleanor's natural



charms, and well was she repaid for the keen interest she took in her friend's appearance, so graceful and *distingué* did her beautiful heroine appear, even amid that brilliant circle, in the elegant Paris muslin in which, according to her previous promise to Augusta, she arrayed herself for the occasion, and which, my youthful readers may like to know, was a fabric of the finest texture, and it shewed off her symmetrical figure to full advantage.

Augusta, too, looked her very best, and if less attractive than her friend, was far too interesting, intelligent, and pleasing to pass unnoticed, though it was easy to perceive that her ambition was not to captivate in a London drawing room ; but, on the present occasion at all events, to watch with enthusiasm the sensation which Eleanor's splendid charms of person and winning manners produced on the company in general, but more especially on her cousin, who had only seen her in simple morning costume as yet, and on Lord Thorn-



bury, whose devotion to Eleanor was now too apparent to escape observation, Augusta having quite made up her mind that his attentions to Miss Leigh were too *prononcé* for mere friendship, notwithstanding the twenty years' difference in age to which Eleanor had alluded on the first mention of his name.

No sooner had the first introduction taken place, than Captain Wyncroft, who had been anxiously watching the arrival of each new comer, as he had found it more convenient to take a cab straight from home instead of joining the trio from Carlton Gardens, came forward to propose a visit to the conservatory, which was indeed a brilliant mass of exquisite flowers, the numerous shades of colour being intermingled with most artistic taste and skill. Geraniums, fuschias, and heaths, together with some of the rarest exotics ; and here and there a foretaste of summer, in little stone vases of mignonette, heliotrope, and verbenas of many hues ; and whilst descanting on the beauties

of these "lovely stars of earth," as a modern poet so happily terms them, Lord Thornbury advanced to meet them, having entered the conservatory from an opposite door, and in his hand was a most exquisite rose bud, which he at once offered to Eleanor, who, whilst accepting it, and gracefully fastening it into her brooch, naively enquired whence such a gem had sprung.

"You do not accuse me of a floral theft, I hope, Miss Leigh, by that remark, as I assure you I am quite innocent of such a crime, notwithstanding the temptations now surrounding us."

An arch smile in Eleanor's eyes crowned her fascinations, as she replied:

"My own experience has taught me that all consciences are not so tender, and you know we hear the charms of theft poetized in regard to water, so why may we not consider *stolen flowers* equally sweet?"

"To prove to you that even such a spark-

ling effusion of logic is unnecessary, though duly appreciated in the present case, I must confess to having gathered it early this morning, from my own green-house at Woodside manor, from which place I am only just returned."

Eleanor's interest was now at its height, and many were the questions she asked relative to that noble domain of which she had already heard so much; and with great satisfaction Lord Thornbury sketched an outline of the old Elizabethan mansion, as it stood amidst the picturesque scenery of the park and its environs, until the sound of the band in the next room invited them to the first quadrille, for which they had been previously engaged, and through which they glided, in full flow of mirthful sallies on Eleanor's side, and of more serious demonstration of affection on the part of her partner, who gazed long and fondly on his charming companion.

Eleanor could no longer mistake his admi-

ration. And did she wish to misunderstand those earnest glances? and that gentle pressure of her hand, as he conducted her to the carriage at the conclusion of the entertainment?

Had not the dances with Captain Wyncroft and Colonel Lennox seemed tame and spiritless in comparison with those when the proprietor of Woodside Manor was by her side? to say nothing of the absence of her manner, when a perfect stranger led her through the intricate mazes of the dance.

Lord Thornbury, at least was fully satisfied with the events of the morning, and a whispered hope that he might experience as much happiness in the coming ball at Colonel Lennox's as he had just done, caused Eleanor to turn aside from the speaking glance which accompanied the sentence, and her usual readiness of reply forsook her.

The comments on the *matinée dansante* as Colonel and Miss Lennox and Eleanor drove

back to Carlton Gardens, soon restored her to her usual equanimity, which was, however, again disturbed as evening came on, by a *tête-à-tête* with Augusta, over the drawing-room fire, after dinner, when Mrs. Lennox had gone upstairs to write in her own room.

"Well, dear Eleanor, I have been longing for a moment alone with you, to congratulate you on the conquest you have so evidently made. I assure you I heard suppressed hints of his lordship's attentions and intentions at intervals all through the morning, and I got almost tired of explaining to people who my fascinating friend was."

"No wonder," replied Eleanor. "I should not have satisfied their curiosity so easily ; but seriously, dear Augusta, what do you think of Lord Thornbury ?"

"Think of him, my cautious friend ; why I think you would suit the distinguished position of a Lady Thornbury *à merveille*, and you will do the honours of Woodside Manor to perfection. Do not expect me to betray



myself into any remarks on its owner, lest I unconsciously touch a tender point, and you know I had never set eyes on your friend until ten days ago ; but I will observe him more critically next time," added Augusta with a smile.

"It is rather strange Lord Thornbury should have remained unmarried so long," remarked Eleanor, "as he must be past forty considerably."

"Oh!" exclaimed Augusta, "do you not know that he is a—"

But here she suddenly checked herself, though Eleanor's interest was too keen to allow of such a sudden termination.

"A what?" dear Augusta. "Do you mean to say he is a widower?"

"Well, I was too late in my good intentions of leaving this melancholy fact for its proper denouement, so I may as well relate to you all that Frank Wyncroft told me this morning in regard to Lord Thornbury's past history."

Eleanor begged her to remember every


word that had passed about him, when Augusta proceeded to give her the sketch which she had received from her cousin that morning at Lady Venn's.

Lord Thornbury had married soon after he came into the property on his father's death, and to all appearance his young wife was blessed with a good share of health, but within a year of her marriage a severe attack of brain fever came on, and terrible to relate, hopeless insanity supervened after severe struggles between life and death. Her heart-stricken husband, who was devotedly attached to his beautiful bride, finding separation necessary, placed her in the most comfortable home which could be found for those afflicted in so dreadful a manner, and went abroad himself and wandered restlessly over the Continent, very gradually recovering the shock his domestic life had sustained so early in its outset; when the news of her death eventually recalled him, and it was just three

years since his return to England—but his associations with Woodside Manor were still too painful for him to remain there long together, “though,” added Augusta, “he now seems quite ready to console himself with another lovely bride.”

Eleanor’s eyes had been suffused more than once during the recital of such a harrowing tale, which had increased her previous interest in the hero fourfold, but sunshine soon beamed from her countenance as she replied gaily—“It is rather premature to assert the fact as yet, Augusta, but poor man! how he must have suffered, it makes one’s heart ache to think of him.”

Oh! Eleanor, and ought not your heart to have ached still more in remembrance of one in the far west, who was toiling on in patience and hope, quite unsuspecting of the impending blow which will crush every hope, and it may be for ever destroy all confidence in feminine faith and truth? Has



ambition so fatally woven its meshes around you as to eclipse all remains of that first fresh feeling of love which you gave, or thought you gave to Charles Stafford? Eleanor's reasonings during her wakeful hours that night were all apologetic to her own conscience.

"Our acquaintance was very slight really, and very likely on a further knowledge of each other our feelings would have changed.

"Poor Charles! I dare say it will be a mortification to him if he hears I have become Lady Thornbury, but he will soon console himself and if he did but know it Maude would suit him far better than I should." Such was the strain of Eleanor's reverie, and in the same style of excuses for herself the days past away until the evening of the ball arrived, when the two young ladies of course made a "grand toilette" for the occasion, and a most successful arrangement it was. Eleanor looking like a fairy in gossamer, her

full flowing skirt of white tulle over silk, dotted all over with minute silver stars, producing a most glittering effect as she moved, and an exquisite wreath of wheat in frosted silver, with here and there a spray of blue "Forget-me-not" setting off the classical arrangement of her hair to the best advantage, her only ornament in the way of jewellery being a necklace of turquoise, which rested on her swan-like neck of marble whiteness. Augusta's dress was of the same material, both having been fashioned by the same modiste, but her ornaments were different, nor had she been so fortunate as Eleanor in the way of a bouquet.

It was easy to see the effect on Lord Thornbury, as Eleanor appeared resplendent in her almost peerless beauty, wearing the noble cluster of geraniums and lilies which he had sent to her a few hours before, and for which she immediately tendered her prettiest thanks, which he, on his part acknowledged, by

claiming her hand for the promised quadrille which was then in course of arrangement. At its conclusion he persuaded her to take a turn in the hall, which had been highly decorated for the occasion, and was lined with sofas and chairs, making a pleasant retreat from the ball-room occasionally.

Eleanor began to experience some slight embarrassment as her partner selected a couch behind one of the pillars as their resting-place, and commenced conversation by enquiring if she had any friends or relations abroad, he having been made rather anxious about a friend of his own in the West Indies, by hearing that yellow fever was raging in fearful intensity in some of the islands, but especially in Barbadoes, where his friend was resident.

Eleanor adroitly turned the subject, without in any degree betraying unusual interest in it, by remarking that bad news of any kind would fly quickly enough, without going out to meet it in forebodings and anxiety, but she

hoped his friend might escape so fearful a malady.

Her perfect self-possession banished all the fear, which the loss of it, on the mention of Charles Stafford's name, as being in Barbadoes, on the occasion of the luncheon in Carlton Gardens, had kindled in his suspicious mind ; and with revived courage he expressed his delight in meeting her again, assuring her that he had been living on the fond anticipation of this ball, ever since he parted from her as she drove off from Lady Venn's reunion. He hoped he had not been flattering himself in vain, that a mutual feeling of warm sympathy already existed between them, as she could not have been unconscious of his adoration, since the first moment he saw her in those fields near Norrington ; and he now entreated her to relieve him from the agonies of suspense, by an assurance of his not being mistaken in this respect.

“ Only, dearest Eleanor, say that you will

love me, and if a deep and fond attachment can make you happy, it shall be my first and dearest study to render you the happiest of wives. Your society would make a perfect paradise of Woodside Manor, dreary though it now seems, when I am there in solitude."

And, taking her hand in his own, he added:—

"Only say the irrevocable 'Yes,' and you shall never have cause to regret it, so God help me!"

A perceptible tremor ran through Eleanor's frame, and she was just beginning some reply in a faint voice, when the approach of Captain Wyncroft, to claim her for a promised waltz, restored both the lovers to apparent composure.

"Oh, here you are, Miss Leigh! I have been searching for you in every nook and corner, to claim you for this waltz, though I am sorry to be so barbarous as to remind you of unfulfilled engagements during such an in-



teresting tête-à-tête, which I have so uncere-  
moniously interrupted; but the band has  
struck up my favourite 'Star of the Evening,'  
and I cannot bear to lose a turn."

She rose from her seat, and off they whirled,  
leaving Lord Thornbury to soliloquize on  
what the unuttered reply to his proposal  
would have been had it issued from her  
lips.

The smile she bestowed on him as she took  
her partner's arm, was sweet enough to in-  
spire hope, and earnestly he gazed after her  
graceful form, as it floated away in the circle  
of waltzers.

There were many beautiful and elegant  
girls, amongst the assembled company, radiant  
in smiles and good humour, as well as most  
favourable specimens of the sterner sex, so  
that flirtations abounded as usual, some open  
as daylight—others half concealed; but all  
seemed to progress favourably, under the con-  
venient auspices of music and dancing; but

no eye was brighter, no step more buoyant than Eleanor's, as she and her handsome partner persevered in their waltz, and an apparent unconsciousness of her loveliness and powers of fascination, heightened its effect on the spectators.

Her ambition had indeed been crowned with success, and brilliant prospects lay before her to stamp their bright visions of happiness on that speaking countenance, and Augusta, who watched her friend's expressive face, felt sure that the flush of pleasure now so perceptible thereon, had its origin in a proposal from Lord Thornbury; and with some impatience awaited the end of the evening to discover the truth of her suppositions.

Eleanor was engaged several dances deep, but at length arrived at the next quadrille, which she had promised to Lord Thornbury, who suggested her retiring to their former quiet retreat to rest instead of dancing it, when on Lord Thornbury's entreating for one little

word only, provided that word were "Yes," in reply to his proposal in the early part of the evening, Eleanor begged to be allowed a few hours for reflection, and proposed giving her answer the following day, at Richmond Park, where they had arranged to pass the afternoon, according to Colonel Lennox's proposal.

Lord Thornbury was obliged to content himself with this arrangement, attributing the delay to a feeling of timidity on Eleanor's part, and without any great amount of apprehension as to what that final response would be. And a gentle return of the pressure of his hand when they said their adieux at the close of the ball, fully sustained his brightest hopes.

All the company were no sooner dispersed, and Eleanor in her room, than after a little knock at the door, Augusta came in, and begged to know if the evening had been a happy one to her, for, she added, "I saw you

in a *tête-à-tête* more than once with Lord Thornbury, and Frank Wyncroft hinted to me that he had disturbed a very suspicious looking conversation, quite early in the evening."

"Your cousin would scarcely guess how thankful I was to him for coming up at the moment he did, Augusta; for I need not disguise the important secret from you, that Lord Thornbury has proposed."

"And have you accepted him, dear Eleanor?"

"Not exactly, dear; though I suppose he feels tolerably safe! but you know he is engaged to join our party at Richmond tomorrow, and then my fate is to be sealed. It is rather nervous work, when things of this kind come to a crisis—Is it not?"

"My experience is not great in this line," replied Augusta; "but surely when your mind is once made up, there is not much difficulty in confessing it—and my own sweet friend, Eleanor, is too honest to say one thing

and mean another—so what can have hindered you from putting Lord Thornbury out of his misery at once?”

Perceiving Eleanor becoming very pale and agitated, she was going to say good night, when Eleanor begged her to listen to something which she feared would surprise and shock her.

She proceeded to narrate the passages between Charles Stafford and herself, though intermingled with many specious excuses for her own inconstancy, pleading the slightness of their acquaintance, the difference of their tastes and pursuits, and the folly of their having entered into any kind of engagement on so very short a friendship, with many other reasons and arguments to suit her purpose, and she ended by trying to persuade Augusta that his regrets could not be more than transient ones under the circumstances, and a promise of profound secrecy was given on Augusta's part.

Eleanor's mind was not rendered much

lighter by the confession to her friend, as she perceived the effect on her.

Augusta wisely refrained from saying much on the subject, though she did very earnestly chime in with Eleanor's hopes, that he would soon forget her, or at all events, cease to care for her, and she felt that her congratulations would be insincere and heartless if offered at that moment; so again bidding her good night, she retired to her own room, to cogitate over conduct she considered so blameable, not to say despicable, on the part of one she had hitherto looked up to as a bright shining star. However, Eleanor's mind was fairly made up, and if a scruple occasionally intruded itself, it was set down with firm resolve. But how could she write and tell Charles?

She remembered that she had entirely missed writing by the last mail, and that the two or three preceding ones had borne out very rapid and brief epistles from her. She hoped this might in some degree prepare his mind for the fatal truth, but she must have

forgotten that his heart and mind were of different mould from her own, and he would not suspect others of a fickleness he would have so much despised in himself; however, Eleanor felt she could not write herself, but with a determination to get Maude to do so, if Mrs. Ferne did not like to undertake the task, she fell asleep.

Visions of imaginary Woodside Manors under a burning sky, and with negroes busy at work on the estate, haunted her throughout the night, rendering her sleep unrefreshing, and Colonel Lennox rallied her on her pale looks, as she appeared rather *distract* at the breakfast table the following morning, but wound up by hoping Eleanor would find the missing roses in Richmond Park, to which place indeed it was almost time to start, as he had ordered the horses to be in readiness at two o'clock, and they were late at breakfast after the dissipation of last night.

The trio, Colonel Lennox and his daughter, with Eleanor, had just mounted, when Lord

Thornbury and Captain Wyncroft were seen riding up to join them, and all started together, but when they came to some of the narrower paths in Richmond Park, Augusta contrived to take the lead with her father and cousin, leaving Lord Thornbury and Eleanor at a convenient distance, of which his lordship speedily availed himself, evincing some impatience to receive the promised answer to his all-important request, when Eleanor blushing accorded the earnestly-entreated "Yes!" and happiness beamed from every feature of both their faces, when, after some minutes, they rejoined the rest of the equestrians.

It was a lovely day ; the hawthorns in full bloom, and the delicate young green of the foliage shewing out against its back-ground of deep blue sky, primroses and hyacinths unfolding in rich profusion in their path, and not until the sun was sinking low on the horizon did they turn their horses homewards.



## CHAPTER X.

"O, coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst  
know how many fathoms deep I am in love!"

AS YOU LIKE IT.

"MAUDE, my dear Maude, what is the matter? any bad news from Eleanor?"

The party at Oak Cottage were seated at breakfast; the postman's budget had just been dispensed, and the three had become at once engrossed in the contents of their letters. Mr. Ferne's exclamation was caused by a little half-suppressed cry from Maude, who became so suddenly pale that his first idea was, "Put some brandy in her tea."

"No, thank you, papa; I was only startled,

surprised, there is no bad news. No one is ill, I mean."

"What does she say, my dear; is she coming back, soon?"

"Oh, papa, Eleanor is engaged—engaged to Lord Thornbury!"

"You don't say so! Well, I thought there was something going on in that quarter, so attentive as he seems to have been; but what's to become of Mr. Stafford? how is that to be managed—eh?"

"Oh, papa! poor Charles! Cruel Eleanor! how could she so soon forget?"

"My dear Maude," chimed in Mrs. Ferne, "you must make allowances for Eleanor; she is very beautiful, very fascinating, and she is wise to make the most of her opportunities. Mr. Stafford might after all never be able to afford to offer her such an establishment as would suit her. You do not know the trials of poverty, Maude; I do, and am sure that Eleanor could never be happy as a poor man's

wife; she has never taken any interest in house-keeping; she never enters into my trials in that way. No, I don't see why you need look so indignant, and flush up in that way; depend upon it, Eleanor has done well for herself. Her marriage will be a good thing for you, Maude, in many ways—mind you keep friends with her—don't let her think you disapprove of her conduct, or any of that sort of nonsensical romance."

Maude could stand it no longer; she choked back the words that rose to her lips—hastily drank her cup of tea, and leaving the rest of her breakfast untouched upon her plate, retired to her own room to read Eleanor's letter again in peace, and try and realize all that it contained.

Eleanor's letter was but a short one, very different from those she usually wrote to her cousin. Yet the composition, short and constrained as it was, had cost her more trouble than she had ever bestowed upon a

letter before. She wrote, and re-wrote, and then destroyed sheet after sheet, at last in a fit of impatience she had said :

“The shorter, the better; I know what Maude will think of me; but I cannot help it; surely I am the best judge of what is for my own happiness.”

The letter was as follows :—

“Carlton Gardens.

“DEAREST MAUDE,

“I am going to surprise you very much, and vex you a little, I fear, but on reflection I imagine my kind relations at Oak Cottage will think I have done wisely. I have for some time thought that I made a great mistake in accepting Charles after so short an acquaintance, and lately I have been more and more convinced of it. I could not be happy to let you remain a day longer in ignorance of my engagement to Lord Thornbury. Now, dear Maude, I am truly happy—if you

knew how exactly our tastes and opinions are suited to each other, I am inclined to think you would all congratulate me. At all events do not write to me until you can do so, for my mind is quite made up, and any lectures from my wise cousin would come too late."


"Too late indeed," sighed Maude, as she folded up the letter, after reading it again and again. "Why did she ever go to London—poor Charles! what a blow to all his hopes. Oh Eleanor! Eleanor! to throw away a heart like his! no, I cannot write to her to-day, I cannot congratulate her, and so I must not write!"

She leant her head on her hand, and a few quiet tears stole between the slender fingers, as she pictured to herself poor Charles Stafford working hard in a foreign land, far from all he loved, with *one* bright hope to cheer him through all his difficulties and troubles—the hope of calling one day his wife, the woman who had forgotten him—forgotten all her

vows, sold herself for gold—for a title. “I know it is so,” said Maude, starting up—“I know she cannot love Lord Thornbury, or she must be changed indeed if she can—I cannot let her do it without *one* warning—she may be angry, but still, for Charles’ sake—” she opened her writing desk and wrote—“you do not expect congratulations from me, dear Eleanor, but you do expect lectures, well, I will disappoint you—I will only ask whether you have thought seriously over your present prospects? If your love for Charles Stafford was a dream, which seemed so real once—are you sure that Lord Thornbury is so far superior, that your attachment to him will be more lasting? Dearest Eleanor, think well what you are doing—I say this not for Charles’ sake so much as for your own, for your happiness is my first thought. Can you who have loved, and been loved by, Charles Stafford, ever really, in your inmost heart, so far lower your standard as to be perfectly

satisfied with a Lord Thornbury? Forgive me, dear Eleanor, and write soon to tell me that you have done so."

"She cannot feel that he would ever make her happy—ah no, it must be that better thoughts will come—she must have written in a hurry." Then again she remembered that Lord Thornbury's attentions, even when he was staying at Ashwell, were received with evident pleasure by Eleanor, and Maude remembered, that people, who were not in the secret of the engagement to Charles Stafford, had remarked it often to her, while she, feeling that she knew more than they did, had never given the subject a moment's serious thought as to the possibility of breaking vows entered into voluntarily by both, such an idea had not entered into her head. Maude was so far romantic, that she cherished fond visions of constancy and truth, in all matters of love; in fact she could form no idea of love without them, and a feeling that could



be influenced by gold or lands did not come under her definition of love at all. So she mused until her head ached, and she remembered that she must not allow her troubles to interfere with her morning's duties, so she went down stairs again, with a pale and anxious face—and that day and the few next passed over as usual, only every morning as the post-bag was brought in, her heart beat quicker, as she eagerly looked for another letter from Eleanor, scarcely owning to herself what was nevertheless the case, that she expected to hear that there had been some mistake about the news which had so distressed her. She waited, however, in vain, no letter came from Eleanor, but three or four mornings afterwards, Mr. Ferne in the distribution of letters, reserved for himself one in a strange handwriting, with a coroneted crest upon the seal. "Ah! all right" he said, as he opened it—"very polite of his Lordship, asking for my sanction to his engagement with Eleanor,



he had no doubt about that though, I can see very well."

"And what shall you say, papa?"

"Say, why that I am most happy to resign my ward into such good guardianship, to be sure! What a fine match for Eleanor!"

"Maude, my dear," added Mrs. Ferne, "I should like you to mention Eleanor's engagement to the Boltons as soon as possible; it would only be polite you know, as Sir Andrew is such a friend of Lord Thornbury's. Perhaps, however, you have already done so?"

"No, mamma," said Maude, "I have not liked to mention it to anyone. I thought she might not after all."

"What, Maude, you are absurd enough to go dreaming on in that ridiculous way,—still harping on Charles Stafford!"

In the course of the afternoon, Maude set out, at her mother's desire, to call on Arabella Bolton.

"Don't tell her," said Mrs. Ferne, as if you came over on purpose to tell the news, and don't seem as if you were proud of it. (Ah, poor Maude, how easily you might promise that.) Mention it quite casually as you are coming away ; I think that will be best. I am sorry I cannot drive with you this afternoon, but I am too busy."

Maude felt very sad as she drove off; the way to Bolton Park was more especially associated with Charles Stafford, and somehow she felt almost as if it was an act of treason on her part, to take any part even in announcing the change which would give the deathblow to the hopes which were so bright when they used to meet him so often in those pretty lanes and fields.

She was so sad that she felt she must stop awhile at the Rectory, where she knew she should meet with that sympathy which was denied her at home. Miss Hastings listened to her story with surprise and sorrow.

"I, too, dear Maude," she said, "am deeply  
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disappointed in Eleanor. I had often fancied she was ambitious, and inclined rather to look down upon our quiet country life, and my brother and I had often feared that there was danger of her becoming too much thrown off her balance, by the fascinations of London society. But it may be better than we fear, after all; with a wife, such as Eleanor would make to one whom she truly loved, Lord Thornbury might become a different character. Perhaps, too, all that report says of him, may not be true."

Maude dared not tell the real source of her trouble—the broken engagement to Mr. Stafford, so she went away with that, the worst grief, unsympathized, and unrelieved.

"Not at home," was the answer to her enquiries at Bolton Park, and she was truly glad to turn her pony's head homewards. She had scarcely, however, had time to take off her hat, before Mrs. Bolton and Arabella came into the pretty little drawing-room at Oak Cottage.

Arabella's brow was clouded, and Maude's heart sank within her, as she foresaw that whatever might have already occurred to disturb the equanimity of that young lady's temper, the intelligence which she knew her mother was intent upon communicating, would not tend to improve matters.

"My dear Mrs. Ferne, I am so glad to find you at home. I feared this fine day might have tempted you to take a drive with your husband."

"Maude, I believe, has been out this afternoon," said Mrs. Ferne; "but really, just now I have so much to occupy my thoughts, that I can seldom find any time for pleasure. Dear Eleanor!" she sighed, "my mind is so full of her at present."

"Is it true, then?" asked Arabella, "is she really engaged to Lord Thornbury? Sir Andrew Bolton seemed to think she was trying all she could to captivate him. He said it was really shocking to see the way Miss

Leigh went on. I beg your pardon, Miss Ferne, I see you don't like my speaking the truth; but you must know what a desperate flirt your cousin is."

"Woodside Manor is such a splendid place, I am told," said Mrs. Ferne, a smile of satisfaction stealing over her hard features; "but I daresay you have heard the particulars from Sir Andrew; poor man, it is really very creditable to him to think so highly of his friend as he does; for when he is with him, if he has any sense at all, he must be so painfully conscious of his own deficiencies. It is certain that he never appears to so little advantage as in Lord Thornbury's society. Really, while he was with you for so long after his accident, he seemed a little brighter, we thought. I suppose, however, poor young man, it was only from having no one to compare him with. What a bore you must have found it," she continued, turning to Arabella, "to have to amuse a poor half-witted creature like that."


"Indeed, Mrs. Ferne, you have a very mistaken impression of Sir Andrew ; he may be shy and reserved, not so talkative as some people—but there is much more in him than people could imagine who have not the pleasure of knowing him intimately. Arabella and he got on exceedingly well together. It is so seldom one meets with a young man of rank so perfectly unaffected and modest, it is quite delightful !"

"For my part," said Arabella, "I think Sir Andrew Bolton far superior to Lord Thornbury in every way. I wonder Eleanor did not attempt to captivate him ; but I imagine she soon found out that that would be of no use ; he is not the sort of man to be attracted by a pretty face !"

"But, my dear," broke in Mrs. Bolton, "let me tell you there are not many girls who would have accepted Lord Thornbury—why, who is he ? An old widower, with a mad wife—had a mad wife, at least, and all the world knows how that came about."

"Oh, Mrs. Bolton, do tell me about his first wife!" said Maude, eagerly.

"She would not be likely to tell you about that, my dear, if she knows it, which, most likely she doesn't; but I think you ought to tell her. His wife, poor young thing, she was only about seventeen or eighteen, was very beautiful—not like Eleanor; but small and delicate, with soft blue eyes, and such a lovely complexion. She was in love, they said, with a young officer, and because he was poor, her friends would not hear of it; and they persecuted and threatened the poor little thing, who had not a bit of spirit in her, till her life was a burden to her, and she gave in at last, and married Lord Thornbury—but she told him that she could never love him; that her heart was given to another. Unlucky it was for her that she did tell him, she had much better have kept it to herself: for Lord Thornbury let her have no peace after they were married; he set all the servants to be spies upon her, he read all the letters she



wrote or received, and one day he brought her a letter from the young officer, and they came to high words—and it was never known what he said or what he did, but she became ill from that day, and had a brain fever, and never had her senses right after that—and they said it was sad to hear the poor thing calling for Frederic to come and save her from Lord Thornbury.”

Maude grew pale, and shuddered ; but her mother said lightly :

“ Oh, yes, I daresay ! people will make up such extraordinary stories about nothing, they exaggerate every little thing so much. I think I remember some such story, but I think it was some other name—not Thornbury ; or else I have no doubt it was made up by some one who owed him a grudge.”

“ Mr. Ferris told me,” returned Mrs. Bolton, feeling aggrieved at her information being treated so lightly ; “ and he ought to know, for he has had Lord Thornbury’s estates to



see to for some years, and his father before him. Miss Ferne, I advise you not to ask Mr. Ferris anything about Lord Thornbury, if you do not wish to hear what you might not like."

"Here is papa, returned from his walk," said Maude, to turn the subject, and Mr. Ferne's entrance, mutual enquiries, and conversation regarding the weather, occupied all, till the Boltons rose to take their leave.

The chief topic of their conversation as they drove back to Bolton Park, was Eleanor's engagement, and the effect it had produced upon Maude.

"My dear, depend upon it that poor girl is as jealous as she can be, at her cousin's making such a fine match; did you notice how pale she has grown? She looked, too, as if she had been crying; she might naturally feel vexed at her cousin having so much more attention than herself, but she need not shew it so openly."

"No," returned Arabella, "I must say I wonder at her, because she must know that Eleanor's marriage, if it should ever take place, will be the means of introducing her into a very superior style of society, far above anything *she* could ever have expected. You will see, mamma, she will throw overboard Mr. Hastings now, if she has a chance of becoming acquainted with Eleanor's grand friends."

"Mr. Hastings! You don't mean that he cares for her?"

"Why, mamma, she is always at the rectory, and always going about with Miss Hastings to the schools; and the singing practices, and all that sort of thing; and it is not likely she would ever take that trouble, if she did not think Mr. Hastings would admire her for it—pretending to be so good—I have no patience with her, when everybody can see her motives."

Poor Maude, little she knew what designs

were attributed to her; and in happy ignorance, she went on day after day in her usual routine of duties and pleasures—amongst the chief of which she reckoned her frequent visits to the rectory, and walks with Miss Hastings.

In the course of a week or two Eleanor's letters became nearly as frequent and as affectionate as ever, though every now and then a shade of sadness apparent in them, which would not have been noticed by any one less keenly watchful than Maude, made her feel as well, as if Eleanor had told her, that there were times when she did not feel so perfectly happy and light hearted as she wished to appear.

It seemed that Lord Thornbury was in constant attendance upon his beautiful *fiancée*; that he lavished the richest and most tasteful presents upon her, and at length Eleanor owned to Maude that she had been induced to consent that the happy day which was to place

a coronet upon her brow, should not be long deferred, and her letters soon began to be filled with long accounts of shopping expeditions, "as Augusta," she said, "insisted upon seeing all the glories of her trousseau before she left London."

Week after week Eleanor's return home was delayed, and Maude could not help owing to herself that her cousin's friendship for her could not any longer be as in the days of old, and she tried hard to reconcile herself to the idea, but it gave her a sharp pang to think that, of Eleanor's own free will, she should so much curtail the short remaining time she could now spend at Oak Cottage. It would be vain to attempt to describe the exultation and delight of Mrs. Brooks when the news of Eleanor's engagement became known to her.

"That is just as it ought to be," she said to Maude, as she met her one morning returning from the school. "Miss Eleanor was a deal

too good to go out to they sugar mines, with nothing but blacks; not but what Mr. Stafford was very well to look at, and if he had been Lord Thornbury now, there'd have been nothing to say against him. But now, I'm so pleased! I couldn't eat a bit of dinner after Master Tom came in and told me. Well! I says to James, she'll be a ladyship after all, and Miss Bolton 'll be fit to kill her. When is she coming home, Miss Maude, and when is the wedding to be?"

Maude satisfied her on these points to the best of her ability, and then tried to pass on, but Mrs Brooks was determined to have her talk out, and asked whether anything had been heard lately from Mr. Stafford, and what he said to Eleanor's change of mind.

"There has been no time yet to hear from Mr. Stafford," said Maude, sadly; "he can scarcely yet have heard of it."

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Brooks, shaking her head, "we must all bear what's laid upon us,



and 'twould have been a thousand pities for Miss Eleanor to have been sort o' wasted ; now she'll hold up her head with any lady in the land, I warrant, and the other will get a black wife out there, and 'twill all be right after all, and she will have the most lovely clothes as can be got for money, and look like a queen, she will. My Lady Thornbury ! how fine it do sound, but you don't seem half so well pleased as you might be, Miss Maude ; now don't you fret ; you'll, may be, get a chance now some day, for Miss Eleanor 'll never be the one to set herself up like above her friends ; them as were kind to her won't be the worse for it, depend on it, Miss."

"We shall not be likely to see very much of each other in future, Mrs. Brooks," said Maude. "It is natural for me to feel a little sad when I think of this, but it will always make me happy to hear that dear Eleanor is so."

Charles Stafford was constantly in Maude's

thoughts at this time ; sometimes she pictured him overwhelmed with sorrow and despair. Sometimes she imagined him writing such a letter as must almost break Eleanor's heart, and sometimes the wild thought entered her head, that he would make one last effort, and come home determined to see her and make an appeal to her better feelings.

"Oh, that anything might yet occur to prevent this marriage !" she thought.

She dared not say more to Eleanor on the subject, but day by day the impression grew stronger and stronger in her mind that no happiness could be the result of broken vows and cold ambition.

## CHAPTER XI.

“ Filled with the thoughts of love was Evangeline’s heart, but  
a secret  
Subtile sense crept in of pain and indefinite terror,  
As the cold, poisonous snake creeps into the nest of the  
swallow.”

“ MY dear, you really ought to invite Sir Andrew Bolton to come and spend a little time here ; you know as well as I do that he said he should like to see this part of the country in the spring.”

So said Mrs. Bolton to her husband, who had just opened his newspaper, and was about to carry it off to his own room, where he hoped to enjoy it undisturbed.

“ Well ! the poor young man is quite at




liberty to come here if he likes, he is not in my way at all."

"In your way? Mr. Bolton, what can you mean? in your way?—I should think not. But how is the young man to come if you do not invite him?"

"Why, cannot you write and ask him, or let Arabella, she would be glad enough to do so!"

"Mr. Bolton you are just like a bear—of course we can do no such thing! So now sit down at once and write a nice letter, you can if you will, so do be obliging for once. Say that we hear Lord Thornbury is coming down to Oak Cottage next month, and we think it will be pleasant for him to meet his friend."

"As if he could get a word or a look from his Lordship, when he only comes for a day or two's love-making. No, no, find some better excuse than that," said the good-tempered Squire, who was too well versed in the ways of his household not to understand a little at least of their wishes and schemes.



"Very well, then, tell him you want his opinion of your new horse, or anything of that kind, you know very well what I mean, you need not look so stupid."

"What must be, must," said the Squire, too happy to escape at last with his newspaper, having bought an hour's quiet with a promise to write to invite the young Baronet.

The letter duly went off, and by return of post came the answer; and one result of the answer was a determination on the part of Mrs. Bolton and Arabella, that a large dinner party should be made in his honour the following week, when it was expected Eleanor Leigh would be at home again, and very probably Lord Thornbury would be a guest at Oak Cottage.

The next week arrived, and with it Eleanor Leigh. Maude drove to the Ashwell station to meet her, and she felt sick at heart as box after box was taken from the luggage van—somehow or other those large black trunks,

covered with cold hard shining leather, looked terribly real. When Eleanor had counted her boxes and given directions about them, she remembered that Maude could not leave her pony, and that it was time she should go to her.

"Well, it must be," she said to herself, "but I dread the first meeting."

She need not have been alarmed. Maude welcomed her with the same sweet smile, the same affectionate warmth as ever.

"Eleanor, dear, I am so happy you are come at last. I began to fear we should see so little of you ;" and she pressed her cousin's hand

Eleanor's veil was down, but it could not hide her deep blush, as she answered, "I have, you know, been intending to come for so long, but there were so many things to do, and Augusta was so determined, and—and then—" she continued, after a slight hesitation, "there was so much that Algernon wished to consult

me about, and Woodside Manor is so much nearer London than Norrington is, so you see altogether I could not help myself. And how are my uncle and aunt, and Tom?"

Maude gave a satisfactory account of all, and they continued talking on indifferent subjects, each carefully avoiding the one on which they were both most anxious to speak, until they arrived at Oak Cottage.

"Well, my dearest niece, I am delighted to see you once more," (it was the first time Mrs. Ferne had ever called her dearest, it was the first time she had been received with such manifestations of affection as were lavished upon her now by her aunt.) "Let me kiss you, my dear Eleanor, and wish you happiness—and dear, Lord Thornbury did not come down with you! I trust he is well, when shall we have the pleasure of seeing him?"

"He has arranged to come to the Dolphin for a few days next week, aunt; he thought in my uncle's state of health it would really


suit you better than if he accepted your invitation."

This arrangement gave the finishing stroke to Mrs. Ferne's satisfaction. She had long debated whether it would be necessary to invite Lord Thornbury to her house, and the thoughts of the additional expense which would be incurred in entertaining him, made her heart sink within her. Now, her spirits rose in proportion, and the consequence was some heavy attempts at playful badinage which came with very bad grace from her.

"Invitations already!" said Eleanor, opening a little note which lay upon her dressing table, when she went up stairs to take off her bonnet.

"Yes," said Maude we have had similar ones, "a dinner at Bolton Park on the 20th."

"We must go," said Eleanor, "Lord Thornbury will be here then, and it will be good fun to go there with him. Will my uncle and aunt go?"



"They intend to do so, I believe; at all events the invitation has been accepted."

"All right," laughed Eleanor; "but, Maude, how pale you are looking, how selfish of me, I never noticed it until this moment, and you are thinner, dear Maude, you are ill, and you did not tell me!"

"No I am not ill," said Maude, a deep flush crimsoning her cheek—"at all events there is nothing really the matter with me."

Eleanor's heart smote her, as it flashed across her that her cousin had been worrying herself on her account, and she kissed her affectionately.

"Ah, Maude, you must brighten up again now I am come home; we must make the most of this fine weather, and drive and walk about everywhere till we fetch back your banished roses—I do not think London dissipation has done mine any damage," she glanced at the looking-glass as she spoke.

"You are indeed looking well, Eleanor, the

excitement of your London life seems to have suited you ; I never saw you looking better."

"Happiness is a fine cosmetic," said Eleanor.

"And you are really happy?" asked Maude, her deep earnest grey eyes fixed upon her cousin's face with intense eagerness.

"To be sure I am," said Eleanor, "my dear, Lord Thornbury really worships me—and I am the luckiest of women—come, don't look at me in that serious way, I cannot stand those eyes of yours—see here," and she unlocked her dressing case and proudly displayed to Maude a splendid ruby brooch, "Lord Thornbury's last present."

Maude admired it as coldly as she could; her heart swelled as she thought of the day when she had been called upon to admire a certain little emerald ring on her third finger. What was become of that ring now! sent back to its giver she supposed, for she did not see it in the case of jewels, and its place

on the slender finger was occupied by a splendid diamond.

Eleanor was in high spirits, and when she had closed her dressing-case, would not be satisfied until she had displayed some of the contents of her boxes to her cousin, of whose taste she had a high opinion.

"Most of my things remain in town, to be forwarded at once to Woodside Manor. I have only brought a few with me, just what I shall require."

The next week arrived in due course, and with it Lord Thornbury, who, having taken up his head-quarters once more at the Dolphin, spent the greater part of the day at Oak Cottage, or, at all events, in attendance upon Eleanor in her walks and drives.

One day his lordship condescended to dine with the Fernes; but the result of that experiment was not such as to induce him to repeat it.

"You see, my lord," Mrs. Ferne had ob-



served on that occasion, "the exceedingly delicate state of Mr. Ferne's organization, renders it obligatory upon me to be most watchful over the quality of the viands admitted to his table. Not that my husband is wanting in self restraint, but his medical men are of opinion that even the effluvia of a richer dish than ordinary, might be prejudicial to him."

Lord Thornbury bowed, and said, with a side look at Eleanor:—

"It is most kind of you to treat me as one of the family, and truly meritorious in you to avoid the least approach to anything which might be injurious to Mr. Ferne in any way."

Maude coloured, and felt very indignant, for she understood the look that passed between Lord Thornbury and Eleanor.

The dinner party at Bolton Park was a large one, and included most of those inhabitants of Norrington and Ashwell with whom my

readers have already become acquainted, and a few more.

Maude was glad as she entered the brilliant drawing-room with her cousin, to see Mr. and Miss Hastings, and as soon as the first greetings with the host and hostess were over, Mr. Hastings advanced to her side, and remained talking with her until dinner was announced; and that dread and trying interval passed quickly enough to them, if their countenances might be taken as true interpreters of their feelings.

Arabella looked well, and was in a most amiable humour; but her brightest smiles and most lively talk were reserved for Sir Andrew Bolton, whom she scarcely allowed to leave her side, even to speak to the two cousins, as they entered the room.

And their talk was of horses and dogs. Arabella had lately become very learned in such matters—and she was listening with the greatest appearance of interest, to an account

of some wonderful run with the ——shire hounds, and some wonderful feats of Sir Andrew's horse, when Mr. Ferne came up to speak to her.

"My dear Miss Bolton, do allow me to observe to you that you are sitting in a thorough draught. I assure you I felt it to the back of my neck at the other end of the room. Now, pray put something warm over your shoulders; I am sure you will be quite laid up if you neglect your health so sadly."

"Thank you, Mr. Ferne, I am never so plebeian as to catch cold; see, there is mamma calling you, she has found you a warm corner, where you will be quite comfortable. Well, Sir Andrew, pray go on."

"Oh, but where was I?—was I at the hedge, or the broken gate? Really—I—believe—oh, I know. Errington had just said to me, 'You'll not do it, Sir Andrew,' and I felt rather queer about it, but it did not do to show it, you know; so I said, 'Jack, I'm after

you,' and, my eyes ! if Rover didn't carry me over—clean over—like a bird !”

And the baronet gave a sort of shrill whistle between his teeth, as was his wont when highly excited.

Lord Thornbury led Eleanor in to dinner. Mr. Ferris was standing near the door as they passed, and Eleanor could not refrain from giving one triumphant glance as she swept by him ; she wished she had not done so, for she was half frightened at the expression of the eye that met hers. It bespoke such an intense hatred ; the very depths of such a malignant spirit were revealed in that one look, that it spoilt Eleanor's pleasure for the time, and Lord Thornbury wondered what sudden cloud had come over the usually gay spirits of his companion.

Eleanor could not help wishing that she had been more gentle and less scornful in her rejection of his proposals.

“ But after all,” she reasoned with herself,

"it signifies little what such a man as that frets about it. I should have been more civil to be sure; but the very idea was so ridiculous; however, it need not spoil my evening."

And she exerted herself to join gaily in the conversation.

Mr. Ferne never seemed happy on occasions like these: a dinner party was a great trial to him, for besides the difficulty he had in deciding what he might venture to partake of himself, he felt greatly irritated at seeing his neighbours, in spite of his most earnest warnings, eating the most injurious dishes, as he considered, and he felt, as it were in foretaste, all the pains and aches which he expected would follow such imprudence.

"A little chicken, thank you, I think I may venture; no sauce—ah, not a particle of sauce, just the breast, if you please. Ah, the last time I dined here, I had some turkey, I remember, and the sauce disagreed with me. I remember it particularly, because Mr. Stafford was here,

and he tried to persuade me it was not the sauce, but something else, I forget what. Ah! I gave him a great deal of good advice before he went to Barbadoes, and I hope he is now reaping the benefits of it."

"I hope he is well," said Mr. Bolton, "I am very anxious to hear of him again, there was so much fever in the island when I heard last. Ah, Miss Leigh, at one time I had an idea that Mr. Stafford went very often to Oak Cottage! Ah! you blush—well, I don't blame him if he did, poor fellow."

Lord Thornbury looked up quickly; but Eleanor's head was bent down over her plate, and she dared not look up, until the tell-tale blush had somewhat subsided.

Mrs. Ferne came to her relief.

"Mr. Stafford was exceedingly fond of Tom," she said, "and very kind in helping him with a collection of bird's eggs, he was making last year. Mr. Stafford was able to tell him the names of nearly all."

It seemed, however, that something or other had roused some suspicion in the mind of Lord Thornbury, for when the gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, he went at once up to Eleanor, who was sitting on an ottoman somewhat apart from the others, and asked :—

“Eleanor, what made you blush so deeply when Mr. Bolton mentioned Mr. Stafford’s name?”

The blush came again, but she tried to laugh it off.

“We women are whimsical creatures, Algernon : we often blush without any reason.”

“But I know there is some reason, Eleanor, I have seen you more than once change colour at the mention of his name. I see, too, that your aunt and cousin both watch you eagerly, and try to change the subject. I will know the truth ; do you care for this man ? tell me, Eleanor ; I will not have a divided heart.”

Eleanor trembled and turned pale. She

had never seen Lord Thornbury in such a determined mood before ; he stood there, waiting for her answer.

She looked up in something very like fear, and as she did so, saw that Mr. Ferris was standing at the table near, evidently watching them, though he held a book in his hand, with which he appeared to be occupied when she raised her head. Eleanor thought he looked gratified at something.

"Is it because he thinks we shall quarrel?" she thought.

She had had a minute's time to arrange her ideas, and looking shyly at Lord Thornbury, she whispered, "You know, Algernon, mine is not a divided heart. Mr. Stafford is nothing to me, I blushed because—" she hesitated a moment, "because Mr. Stafford admired Maude rather, and she would not like it to be known, so pray do not mention the subject again."

"Ah, poor thing!" said Lord Thornbury,



"I noticed that she was not looking well, I daresay she is anxious about the accounts of the fever. But she seems quite reconciled now to his absence. She and Mr. Hastings seem great friends."

"They do, indeed," said Eleanor laughing. "Well, I should give my consent; he is an excellent man; too quiet for my taste, but very good in his way."

Eleanor continued the rest of the evening in the most brilliant spirits, a more than common tinge of the rose in her cheeks, and a more dazzling sparkle in her eye, were attributed by her friends to the pleasure of shewing off her splendid conquest in the eyes of the Boltons.

Arabella, however, devoted herself so entirely to the Baronet, that she scarcely allowed Eleanor a few minutes' conversation. The remainder of the evening was spent in listening to song after song, poured forth by Eleanor's magnificent voice, sometimes joined in a duet

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by her cousin, as Arabella refused most decidedly to sing, saying she was hoarse.

"Doesn't she scream?" she whispered to Sir Andrew. "I hope Lord Thornbury is rather deaf. It is quite vulgar, I think; do you admire her style?"

Sir Andrew scarcely liked to speak, to break the spell of those thrilling notes now dying away so softly and plaintively.

"Miss Leigh, may I ask one favour?" said Mr. Ferris, advancing to the piano. "I am sure all the party would thank me for entreating you to give us 'Auld Robin Grey.'"

He looked at Eleanor as he spoke, with a meaning in his look, which Eleanor understood but too plainly; for a moment she felt as if she was choking, and the effort seemed impossible, but recalling her courage, however, during a brilliant prelude, she began that lovely air, so touching in its simple sadness, and sang it through with unrivalled

taste and expression. She turned away from the piano when she had finished, deadly pale, and whispered to Maude—

“Is it not very late?”

“Yes, dear, the carriage is at the door, but no one liked to interrupt the singing.”

“Let us go,” said Eleanor, leaning her cold hand on her cousin’s arm.

Maude led her out of the room, and then cloaked and bonneted, they waited until Mr. and Mrs. Ferne had finished their more elaborate leave-takings.

As Maude was sitting, an hour later, in her own room, musing over the events of the evening, and was beginning slowly to prepare for bed, a light tap at her door startled her.

“Come in,” she said, and Eleanor entered the room.

Maude started at her appearance; she was perfectly colourless, and her dark hair, from which she seemed to have hastily torn out the

ornaments, hung in heavy masses over her shoulders; the traces of tears were on her cheeks, and such a sad change was visible in her whole appearance, that Maude started up in alarm.

“Oh, Eleanor, what is the matter?” and putting her arms round her she kissed her affectionately, all causes for reproof forgotten in the sight of her sorrow.

“Maude, I cannot sleep without telling you all; I am very wretched this evening; and now I want to ask you to help me. Oh, Maude, help me! I am so miserable!” and the tears streamed down her face.

“Sit down, dear—tell me what I can do for you—anything, only tell me, do you repent?”

“It is too late, Maude.”

“No, no, not too late even yet, any pain now would be better than repentance by and bye.”

“No, Maude—it was not that I meant to

say ;" she put her hand to her neck and drew off a slender silk chain, " here, Maude, take this, I must not wear it any longer, I have been very foolish, but I could not part with it before," and she put into Maude's hand the little emerald ring.

" Oh, Eleanor! I thought you would have sent that back."

Eleanor put her hands before her face " I could not," she said, " and, besides, I have not written to him for so long."

Maude started.

" You do not mean, Eleanor, that he does not know? you have surely written to tell him that?"

Eleanor made a violent effort to restrain her tears and continued in a broken voice—

" I could not do it, Maude, I have been very weak and foolish, I have put it off from time to time—I have had a letter from him this morning, and now he must be told. Will you write, Maude? he always liked you; you will

break it to him gently, do not leave him to hear it from the Boltons, the mail goes out in two days. Oh, Maude, do not refuse me this kindness. You who are so happy in your own love, do not grudge sharing my trouble for a little while."

"I will write for you if you wish it, Eleanor, but you ought not to ask me—he ought to learn it from yourself."

"Oh do not speak so coldly, Maude, now you are unkind. Ah you fear Mr. Hastings will be jealous—but he need never know," and Eleanor rose to go.

"I do not know what Mr. Hastings has to do with it, but you must not think me unkind. I will write, Eleanor."

Then for the first time the meaning of her cousin's words flashed across her, and she was silent; too well she remembered some words which Mr. Hastings had spoken that evening—words which for the first time had given her the idea that he looked upon her as something

more than a friend, and with bitter self-accusations; which half drowned her troubles on Eleanor's account, she wished her cousin good night.

END OF VOL. I.

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